

# Foundations

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# Foundations Theological Journal

*Foundations* is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics, and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry. Its particular focus is the theology of evangelical churches which are committed to biblical truth and evangelical ecumenism. It has been

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## EDITORIAL

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matt 28:19, NKJV)*

This edition brings together a number of articles which focus on the vital area of mission. The first article is from Dr. Andrew G. Bannister. This is, in part, a response to an earlier article from Rev. Duncan Peters in the Spring 2022 edition of Foundations, "The 'Same God' Issue and the Communication of the Gospel to Muslims". Dr Bannister takes the opposite approach to Rev. Peters, arguing it is inappropriate to speak of Muslims and Christians as worshipping the "same God" even granting the vital caveats and distinctions Rev. Peters makes. While on the topic at hand my sympathies are with Dr Bannister, there is one area in the article where I find the language problematic. The classic doctrine of God carefully affirms (in line with Scripture) that "God does not have blood, does not suffer, cannot be touched with hands." (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.14.2). Whilst I understand the point Dr Bannister is making under the heading of *The God of the Bible has Suffered*, I believe more careful terminology can be employed. That said, this is an important debate and further related contributions are welcome.

Thorsten Prill provides a helpful perspective on cross-cultural training for missionaries, whether Western Christians who are called to serve as missionaries in Africa or African reverse missionaries who come to Europe and other parts of the world. Dr Prill helpfully outlines the importance of cultural intelligence (CQ) for missionary efforts and ways training in this area can be improved. This is also an important area for local church evangelism, as we need to speak into the communities around our church buildings (or meeting venues) with an unchanging message that is appropriately contextualised, as Paul himself did, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake" (1 Cor. 9:22-23).

Hicham El Mostain considers for us the phenomenon known as the "Insider Movement". This is the question of how a convert to Christianity in a Muslim country should relate to Islam. This article considers this question with great sensitivity, and yet with biblical firmness, arguing "Muslims who become Christians will always pay a high price for their faith. The Gospel includes blessing and pain for Christ's sake. Any attempt to change the Christian message in order to help new converts to live an easier life is a betrayal of the full Gospel of Christ." This whole discussion is a live missiological topic and this article is a helpful introduction for those who may be unaware of the debate.

The final two articles consider the nature of worship, and the effects of one stirring worship service from church history. Dr Robert Strivens offers a review article of *Revolutionary Worship: All of Life for God's Glory*, written for a popular audience by William Taylor, rector of St Helen's, Bishopsgate. Dr Strivens argues that in contrast to the thesis of *Revolutionary Worship* Christians gather for worship in a special way on the Lord's Day, without diminishing the truth that all of life is lived for God's glory. Indeed, for Strivens, to lose the special place of gathered worship would "constitute a severe blow to the spiritual health of Christ's church."

In the final article John Keddie considers the impact of a worship service in Scotland in 1596. This service produced what might be called "revival" at the General Assembly of the Church of

Scotland. This is a reminder of the power of preaching when blessed by the Spirit, and a call for us to pray for such power today.

I hope the variety of these articles, and the book reviews in this issue, give much food for thought.

***Dr Donald John MacLean***

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December 2022

# MUSLIMS, CHRISTIANS, AND GOD

## Why Good Theology Is Crucial for Effective Evangelism

*Dr. Andrew G. Bannister*

### *Abstract*

*This article seeks to explore the question of the relationship between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Are they all “sister religions”, or is Islam built upon entirely different theological foundations to the biblical faiths? We will also examine why this is no mere academic question but is a crucial starting point for evangelism and apologetics to Muslims – and why getting this starting point wrong risks, at best, confusing our Muslim friends and at worst, even a sloppy syncretism.<sup>1</sup>*

### *I. Introduction*

What exactly is the relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? Are they *sister* religions, closely related in a kind of monotheistic unity? Certainly many people think so – especially in Western postmodern culture which leans heavily toward the idea that all religions are essentially the same. For example, Richard Bulliet in *The Case for Islamo-Christian Culture* asserts:

[T]he scriptural and doctrinal linkages between Judaism and Christianity are no closer than those between Judaism and Islam, or between Christianity and Islam.<sup>2</sup>

Even among evangelical Christians, there is sometimes a default assumption that Islam is organically related to Christianity and Judaism, even if somewhat remotely.<sup>3</sup> There’s a growing tendency to lump Judaism, Christianity, and Islam together under the generic title of “Abrahamic faiths”, a phrase that has become widespread in the last few decades.<sup>4</sup> But as the Australian linguist and qur’anic scholar Mark Durie wryly remarks, Abraham is a strange figure to use to try to harmonise Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>5</sup> After all:

- For Jews, Abraham is the prototypical Torah observant Jew;
- For Christians, Abraham is the man saved by faith, not works;
- For Muslims, Abraham is the idol-destroying monotheist who rebuilds the Kaaba;

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<sup>1</sup> Sections of this essay were originally published as chapter 4 of Andy Bannister, *Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?*, (London: IVP, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>3</sup> This assumption underpins much of Duncan Peter’s article in this journal; see Duncan Peters, “The “Same God” Issue and the Communication of the Gospel to Muslims”, *Foundations* 82 (May 2022), 22-32, citing 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> See the Google ngram:

[https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Abrahamic+faiths&year\\_start=1800&year\\_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct\\_url=t1%3B%2CAbrahamic%20faiths%3B%2Cc0](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Abrahamic+faiths&year_start=1800&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2CAbrahamic%20faiths%3B%2Cc0)

<sup>5</sup> Mark Durie, “The Abrahamic Fallacy” (<https://markdurie.com/the-abrahamic-fallacy/>), accessed 18 Aug 2022).

Behind the question of how Islam relates to Christianity and Judaism stands the question of the status of the Qur'an. How is the Qur'an related to the Bible – is it a sequel? Those of a pluralistic persuasion argue that there is continuity because both the Bible and the Qur'an are divinely inspired:

Is there any possibility that we are faced not with a choice between rivals [Muhammad or Jesus] but with complementary exemplars, both rooted in divine self-disclosure? ... I do not know how the Qur'an was communicated by God through Muhammad, but I can accept that it was.<sup>6</sup>

Yet sometimes even critical scholars of the Qur'an also speak in terms of continuity; thus Gabriel Said Reynolds of Notre Dame University writes:

[T]he Qur'an and the Bible, far from being incompatible or in opposition, are very much in harmony ... The Qur'an can no longer be seen as a foreign or irrelevant book. It now appears as a work very much within the tradition of Biblical literature, and should be considered as such at universities and seminaries.<sup>7</sup>

Outside the academy, many Westerners assume that the Qur'an and Islam are effectively a sequel to the Bible, Christianity and Judaism. Indeed the 2018 "State of Theology" survey, which surveyed three thousand Christians, found that 46% "agreed very strongly" with the statement "God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam".<sup>8</sup>

## II. *The Qur'an and Confusion*

There's an awful lot of confusion here, a major source of which is the Qur'an, which frequently refers to Biblical stories and characters; the Muslim scholar Faruq Sherif has calculated that approximately 25% of the Qur'an is concerned with stories and traditions that have come from Judaism and Christianity.<sup>9</sup> My academic background is Qur'anic studies and I have been studying the text in depth for some twenty years. And I remember being struck when I first came to the Qur'an by the sheer quantity of this kind of Biblicist material.

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<sup>6</sup> Clinton Bennett cited in Peter G. Riddell, *Christians and Muslims: Pressures and Potential in a Post-911 World* (Leicester: IVP, 2004), 116.

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010), 258.

<sup>8</sup> <https://thestateoftheology.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Faruq Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'an* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1995), 69.



To show what we're dealing with, consider the list of names which turn up in the Qur'an:<sup>10</sup>

Aaron (Qur'an = <i>Harun</i> )	Abraham (Qur'an = <i>Ibrahim</i> )	Adam (Qur'an = <i>'Adam</i> )
Amran (Qur'an = <i>Imran</i> )	David (Qur'an = <i>Dawud</i> )	Elijah (Qur'an = <i>Elias</i> )
Elisha (Qur'an = <i>Alyasa'a</i> )	Ezra (Qur'an = <i>Uzair</i> )	Gabriel (Qur'an = <i>Jibrīl</i> )
Goliath (Qur'an = <i>Jalut</i> )	Haman (Qur'an = <i>Hāmān</i> )	Isaac (Qur'an = <i>Ishāq</i> )
Ishmael (Qur'an = <i>Ismā'il</i> )	Jacob (Qur'an = <i>Yaqūb</i> )	Jesus (Qur'an = <i>Isa</i> )
Job (Qur'an = <i>Ayub</i> )	John (Qur'an = <i>Yahya</i> )	Jonah (Qur'an = <i>Yūnus</i> )
Joseph (Qur'an = <i>Yūsuf</i> )	Lot (Qur'an = <i>Lūt</i> )	Mary (Qur'an = <i>Maryam</i> )
Michael (Qur'an = <i>Mikāl</i> )	Moses (Qur'an = <i>Mūsa</i> )	Noah (Qur'an = <i>Nūh</i> )
Pharaoh (Qur'an = <i>Firawn</i> )	Saul (Qur'an = <i>Talūt</i> )	Solomon (Qur'an = <i>Sulaymān</i> )
Zechariah (Qur'an = <i>Zakariyah</i> )		

Some of these figures get considerable coverage in the Qur'an; for example Joseph has an entire chapter (sura 12) devoted to him whilst the annunciation to Mary is retold at length on two occasions (Q. 3:35-49 and Q. 19:16-34). On top of this, the Qur'an also draws on lots of "Biblicist" material – by which we mean Christian and Jewish traditions not from the Bible. From the Talmud to the apocryphal gospels, from Syriac hymns to Jewish folklore, the Qur'an draws extensively on a wide range of Jewish and Christian materials. No wonder that many people have looked at all of this and concluded that the Qur'an must be a sequel and that Islam is related – a sister religion, or a distant cousin, even – to Christianity and Judaism.

### III. *Borrowing Or Inheritance?*

But just because biblical *names* occur in the Qur'an does not mean that it is a sequel, nor that Islam bears any kind of familial relationship to Christianity or Judaism, nor that we are even dealing with the same story (or even the same expanded universe).

Consider an analogy for a moment. Imagine that on a trip to London you visit the famous Globe Theatre to watch a Shakespeare play, let's say *Macbeth* for example. Before long you are having a wonderful time watching this classic tale of murder and intrigue. Partway through the evening the curtain goes down on Act 4 and you wander off to the bar to get a drink. You return for Act 5, the lights come up, and suddenly everything has changed. Now the stage is full of robots and lasers, flashing lights, dancers, and special effects. It's very noisy and very impressive – but you're totally confused. Sure, there's a robot called "Macbeth", an animatronic alien called "Duncan", a spaceship called "The USS Dunsinane" and talk of a secret weapon called "The Birnam Wood of Doom", but this clearly is *not* the same story. It may be fun and interesting, but it doesn't belong as Act 5 of *Macbeth*.

<sup>10</sup> List derived from the *Qur'an Tools* software. *Qur'an Tools* is a free to use digital edition of Qur'an developed by myself and several other Qur'an scholars out of work originally carried out for our PhDs. It is widely used by many universities, is free of charge, and can be found at: [www.quran-tools.com](http://www.quran-tools.com).

Okay, that was a bit of light relief. But the serious point is that just because we may recognise the names of characters and places, does not automatically make something the same story. And I want to suggest that something not entirely dissimilar is going on when it comes to the Qur'an.

First, let us note that it is not surprising there is Jewish and Christian material in the Qur'an, for pre-Islamic Arabic had a strong and ancient Christian and Jewish presence.<sup>11</sup> Given this background it is therefore no surprise that the Qur'an fished from a common pool of (probably oral) religious traditions, a pool that included Jewish and Christian stories.<sup>12</sup> But simply fishing from a common cultural pool does not make the Qur'an (or Islam) a sequel. Rather we need to ask, when it comes to the Qur'an's use of Jewish and Christian materials, has the Qur'an *inherited* these ideas, or has it *borrowed* them?

What is the difference between *inheritance* and *borrowing*? There are two metaphors that help to illustrate the difference: the first comes from building, the second comes from language. First, consider building. One of my favourite buildings is York Minister, one of the finest cathedrals in England. The beautiful Norman Church and later cathedral were built on top of an older Saxon church, the medieval building growing as the older buildings were repeatedly extended, reworked, and upgraded. Go below ground into the crypt and you see something amazing: not merely can you see how the Saxon foundations underpin the Norman and later medieval church, but you also discover that the older Saxon church was itself built on the ruins of a Roman barracks. Roman rubble was used in the foundations – there is even an old Roman pagan altar jammed sideways into a wall at one point. But there's a difference between the Roman ruins and the oldest parts of the church. As the medieval cathedral grew, it grew organically out of the Saxon and Norman church, as the church was extended and developed. But the Roman ruins in the crypt? Sure, Roman stone was used, but purely for its use as a building material. There is no *continuity* between the Roman ruins and the cathedral. In other words, the medieval cathedral has *inherited* from the Norman and Saxon church structure. But in terms of the Romans? All that was *borrowed* were some pieces of Roman stone that were repurposed and dumped into the foundations. That's the difference between inheritance and borrowing.

In his ground-breaking study, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes*, Mark Durie offers a second metaphor, one that comes from *language*. When two languages derive from a common source, they do not merely share words in common, but they will have deeply related structures. For example, consider the words for "mouse" in English, Icelandic and German:<sup>13</sup>

	Singular	Plural
<b>English</b>	Mouse	mice
<b>Icelandic</b>	Mús	mýs
<b>German</b>	Maus	Mäuse

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Studies that have explored the way the Qur'an was formed in this kind of oral, intertextual milieu include: Mark Durie, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes: Investigations into the Genesis of a Religion* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2018); Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Andrew G. Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an* (New York: Lexington Books, 2014); and Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Source: Durie, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes*, xl.

Observe how the singular and plural forms all show an internal variation in the vowel—this is a shared structural feature which all three languages have inherited. Comparative linguistics analyses patterns like this as evidence for how languages are related. When inheritance has occurred, structure is preserved. By contrast, borrowing is usually highly destructive (recall broken Roman stone in foundations). For example, consider the English word *juggernaut*, borrowed from Sanskrit via Hindi. It originally was *Jagannātha*, a Sanskrit name for a Hindu God. Chariots with huge wheels which crushed devotees were used in religious ceremonies – which led to the English meaning of the word. But all that original context has been lost when English destructively borrowed the term.

Something similar goes on with languages in *creolization*, a process whereby the lexicon of one language is combined with the grammar and structure of another. So, for example, in Haitian Creole, most of the vocabulary is French, but the grammar – the structure and logic – is West African. The process by which a creole is created is called *relexification*: meanings and structure from the *substrate* language are repopulated with forms from the *superstrate*. This can be deeply confusing for native speakers of French, for example, when they encounter Haitian Creole – the words *sound* familiar, but the grammar and structure have nothing in common with French. Haitian Creole is not a Romance language, the family of languages that developed from Latin; rather it is a new and distinct creation. It has not inherited; it has *borrowed*.

How does one tell the difference between *inheritance* and *borrowing*? When something, be it a building or a language, is *inherited*, the underlying systems and structures are brought across as well. When something is *borrowed*, the object is ripped from its context and the structure and systems lost. So, when it comes to the Qur'an, how do we determine if it has inherited from the Bible – if it's a sequel – or if it has borrowed? We need to look at the structure, at the *theology*; not at words, names, and stories themselves but the fundamental theological ideas underpinning them.

#### IV. *The Qur'an and The Bible: Comparing and Contrasting Theology*

Given that theology is, at its core, the study of God, one of the most helpful ways to conduct a brief comparative study of Qur'anic and Biblical theology is by examining what the Bible and the Qur'an have to say about God.<sup>14</sup> Not least because arguably much confusion has been caused over the years in interfaith discussion by the fact that everybody uses the word “god” but seldom are clarificatory questions (e.g. “What do you mean by that word?”) ever asked.

Right at the start, let us acknowledge that it's perfectly possible for the Qur'an and the Bible (and for Muslims and Christians) to agree on some basic facts about God: namely that God exists, that he performs certain functions (e.g. creator, ruler, judge). But that's not enough: we also need to ask about the *character* and the *identity* of the God described by Biblical and by Qur'anic theology. Neither the Bible nor the Qur'an are particularly interested in the purely theoretical question of *whether* God exists – no, rather they consider the infinitely more important question to be *what is God like?* What is God's character, nature, attributes, and identity?

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<sup>14</sup> For a far more wide ranging analysis of multiple theological topics and the differences in how Qur'anic and Biblical theology understand them, see Durie, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes*, chapters 4-6.

Again, consider an analogy. Suppose that I am having a debate with my friend, Kevin, about who was the previous President of the United States of America. Being sufficiently educated to use Google, Kevin informs me that the previous President was Donald Trump. But I have little time for politics and so I'm slightly out of touch: 'I thought the President was Donald Duck,' I reply. Much as Kevin and I might have a thoroughly entertaining debate about the Disneyfication of politics and about who might make the better President, notice something interesting: we both *agree* there is a President, yet we *disagree* over *who* that President is. If you asked 'Do Andy and Kevin believe in the same President?' clearly the answer is 'No'.<sup>15</sup>

In the same way, it is perfectly possible for the Qur'an and the Bible to *agree* on some facts *about* God, whilst disagreeing profoundly about God's identity. And if this is what we indeed discover when we dive deeply into Biblical and Qur'anic theology, this would suggest that what we have in the case of Islam and its relationship to Christianity and Judaism is *borrowing*, not *inheritance*.

So let's proceed by taking a look at three characteristics that are central to the identity of the God of the Bible. These are by no means exhaustive, but nevertheless are fundamental aspects of God's character portrayed on multiple pages of the biblical text, ranging across both Old and New Testaments. In each case, we will then examine what the Qur'an has to say about these same characteristics and thus compare whether its portrayal of Allah looks at all similar to how the Bible describes Yahweh.

Notice, as we proceed, that in the case of Biblical theology we are looking at divine characteristics that are found across the whole of scripture. There's a common mistake in Christian-Muslims of assuming that because Muslims don't worship Jesus, therefore Allah is a "different God". But our Jewish friends do not believe in the divinity of Jesus, nor the Trinity, nor do they worship Christ – so if Jesus is the sole criterion, we must therefore bizarrely conclude that Jews worship a different God (an idea the New Testament would clearly reject!) It is therefore far more helpful to choose divine characteristics that are found in both the Old and New Testaments.

## 1. The God of the Bible is relational

The first major characteristic of Yahweh, the God of the Bible, that we will consider is that Yahweh is *relational*. In Genesis we read how after calling into existence the whole of creation – everything from planets and stars to oceans and continents, from trees and plants to animals, birds, and human beings – after all of this creative activity, what does God do? Yahweh then steps into creation in order to relate, in person, to the first humans: 'Then Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.' (Genesis 3:8)

Throughout the Old Testament we read of numerous 'theophanies', dramatic moments where God again steps down into creation and relates to human beings personally. One of the most astonishing examples comes in Genesis 15, where God appears to Abram (the original name of the

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<sup>15</sup> Boston University professor Stephen Prothero offers another example from politics. Imagine you asked a Communist and a Social Democrat if they both believed in 'politics' and on hearing the answer 'Yes', you assumed that Communism and Social Democracy were essentially the same. Arguably you have missed something fairly crucial, simply because you forgot to ask the vital question: 'What do you *mean* by the word 'politics'?' See Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 1, 9.

patriarch Abraham) and forms a covenant with him. In the Ancient Near East of Abram's day, covenants were often marked by a ceremony where the two parties would cut animals in two and walk between the halves—the symbolism implying *if I break my word, may I be torn apart like these animals*. In a sign of Yahweh's incredible willingness to relate to human beings, God is even willing to take part in a covenant cutting ceremony, passing symbolically between the animals that Abram has severed:

*When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces [of the animals]. On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram. (Genesis 15:17-18)*

Time and time again, the Bible emphasises that as well as being powerful and exalted, Yahweh is also a God who dwells with the lowest of the low. A heavenly king who reigns in power, but also one who is able to stoop down and be present with us:

*For this is what the high and exalted One says—  
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:  
“I live in a high and holy place,  
but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit” (Isaiah 57:15)*

The theme of God relating to human beings runs throughout the whole of the Old Testament and onwards into the New Testament, where it reaches its zenith in the person of Jesus Christ who, according to the Bible, was no mere prophet but ‘God with us’. As the New Testament repeatedly teaches, if you want to see what God is like, look at Jesus:

*[Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation ... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15, 19-20)*

The biblical theme of God's relationality appears at the *beginning* of history, at creation; it appears in the *middle* of biblical history, in the person of Jesus; and it also appears at the *end* of history, in the Bible's highly relational language of what our eternal future will be like. The future hope offered by the Bible is not a cloud-based party in the sky, but rather that we will be raised to eternal life in God's new creation, enjoying an eternity of close relationship with him:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying:  
“Now the dwelling of God is with humankind, and he will live with them. They will be his people,  
and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has  
passed away.” (Revelation 21:1, 3-4)*

That Yahweh is relational is also shown by the sheer number of relational titles that the Bible uses for God. Yes, God is certainly Lord and King, but he is also described as a Father, as a friend, even as a husband. According to Jesus, we can address God simply and intimately as ‘Our Father in heaven’.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 6:9.

So what about Allah, the God described by the Qur'an? By far the main emphasis of the Qur'an in its portrayal of God is not his relationality, but his distance. Allah is never close and personal, but only ever high and mighty, powerful and transcendent, lofty and distant:

*Allah: there is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting. Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth ... His Throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious. (Q. 2:255)*

This theme of Allah's power, transcendence, and distance is repeatedly emphasised by the Qur'an.<sup>17</sup> For example, scholars who have carefully studied the Qur'an's Arabic have noticed that the Qur'an is constructed using highly formulaic language, repeated phrases that are returned to time and time again.<sup>18</sup> The frequency of these formulaic phrases gives an insight into the Qur'an's *central* theological ideas and thus it is noteworthy that the third most common formula in the Qur'an, repeated some 50 times, is the phrase 'Allah is over all things'.

Internationally renowned Muslim scholar Farid Esack sums up this aspect of the Qur'an succinctly: "Belief in the existence of one *transcendent* Creator and the struggle to live with all the implications of that belief may be said to be at the core of the Qur'an's message."<sup>19</sup>

This emphasis of the Qur'an on Allah's transcendence rather than his closeness to human beings is seen in other ways. For example, the Qur'an frequently retells stories from the Bible and from Jewish and Christian tradition. As it draws upon biblical stories, the Qur'an frequently reshapes them to suit its own theology; as it does this, one theme often edited out or downplayed is God's relationality. Consider the Qur'an's retelling of the story of Adam and Eve in the garden:

*"O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and enjoy (its good things) as ye wish: but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression."*

*Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them, bringing openly before their minds all their shame that was hidden from them (before): he said: "Your Lord only forbade you this tree, lest ye should become angels or such beings as live for ever."*

*And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser.*

*So by deceit he brought about their fall: when they tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them: "Did I not forbid you that tree, and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?" (Q. 7:19-22)*

In this Qur'anic retelling of the biblical story from Genesis 3, it is fascinating to see which elements have been retained by the Qur'an and which have been dropped or edited. Notably

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<sup>17</sup> People will sometimes quote Q. 50:16, which speaks of Allah being 'closer to a person than his jugular vein', as an example of Allah's closeness in the Qur'an. But when one reads the entire passage, it is clear that this verse is talking about *judgement*, not relationality: human beings should mind their behaviour, because Allah is literally watching over our shoulder.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of the Qur'an's use of formulaic language, see Andrew Bannister, 'Retelling the Tale: A Computerised Oral-Formulaic Analysis of the Qur'an' (available on the Academia website at <https://www.academia.edu/9490706/>) which is a summary of my much longer *An Oral Formulaic Study of the Qur'an* (New York: Lexington Books, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 147.

changed is that Allah has been abstracted from the scene: yes, he speaks to the first human couple, but he is no longer portrayed as walking with them in his creation.

Something similar happens with the story of the covenant cutting in Genesis 15. The Qur'an has no real concept of covenant (probably because the idea of God *binding* himself to human beings is considered by the Qur'an to be beneath Allah) and so the story of God, Abraham, and the birds is turned into a strange little parable about resurrection:

*(Remember) when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give the dead life." He said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes indeed! But (show me) to satisfy my heart." He said, "Take four birds, and take them close to you, then place a piece of them on each hill, (and) then call them. They will come rushing to you. Know that God is mighty, wise." (Q. 2:260)*

When it comes to Jesus, the Qur'an demotes him to just another prophet, not the Son of God, and certainly not God-come-in-the-flesh to relate to us. About 90 verses in the Qur'an discuss Jesus and the Qur'an uses many of them to play down Jesus's role. For example, the Qur'an reports this conversation between Allah and Jesus:

*(Remember) when God said, "Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to the people, "Take me and my mother as two gods instead of God (alone)?" He said, "Glory to You! It is not for me to say what I have no right (to say). If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within me, but I do not know what is within You. Surely You–You are the Knower of the unseen." (Q. 5:116)*

Finally, what about 'heaven', an idea that in the Bible is far richer than one word can convey and is deeply relational – Yahweh promising to dwell with his people as he did with Adam and Eve in Eden. The Qur'an certainly speaks much about heaven, painting a vivid picture of a place filled with fruit trees (Q. 2:25), rivers of wine (Q. 47:15), and young women to be enjoyed (Q. 52:20).<sup>20</sup> Yet nowhere in these descriptions of heaven does the Qur'an promise its readers any kind of relationship with Allah.

In short, for the Qur'an Allah is distant at the *beginning* of history (not walking with Adam and Eve, nor covenanting with Abraham); he is absent in the *middle* of history (not coming in the person of Jesus); and is *missing* from the end of history (heaven has pleasures, but it lacks God's *presence*).

This emphasis on Allah's distance and transcendence explains why the Qur'an never invites readers into any kind of 'relationship' with God – and it certainly does not permit Muslims to dare to call Allah 'father'. Indeed, in Sura 112, once described by Muhammad as so significant that reciting it is equivalent to reciting a third of the Qur'an,<sup>21</sup> the Qur'an outrightly declares that Allah is not a father and that Allah has no son: "He (Allah) has not begotten, and has not been begotten." (Q. 112:3)

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<sup>20</sup> Later Islamic theology is full of speculation about what the women of Paradise will be like, with some traditions explaining how Allah will renew their virginity every time they have sex with their designated believer. Gabriel Said Reynolds, *Allah: God in the Qur'an* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 87 notes how many Islamic exegetes connected this idea with Q. 56:36-37 which says 'Surely We [Allah] produced them specially and made them virgins'.

<sup>21</sup> See the hadith recorded in *Sahih Bukhari* 5015.



Summarising these crucial differences from the Bible, Muslim philosopher Shabbir Akhtar explains: “Muslims do not see God as their father ... Men are servants of a just master; they cannot, in orthodox Islam, typically attain any greater degree of intimacy with their creator.”<sup>22</sup>

## 2. The God of the Bible is love

The second characteristic of Yahweh that we will examine is that he is a God of love. This is an attribute of God identified by the Bible hundreds of times. For example, in what scholars believe to be one of the very oldest books of the Bible, Jonah, the titular prophet throws a tantrum and wails that God has not destroyed the city of Nineveh because: “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and *abounding in love*, a God who relents from sending calamity.” (Jonah 4:2)

In the Psalms, the hymnbook of the Jewish people and the early Christians, the theme of God’s love is ever-present, such as in Psalm 136, where 26 times we hear the chorus “God’s love endures forever”. Love is one of the ways that Yahweh self-identifies, such as in the book of Jeremiah where we read of Yahweh saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.” (Jeremiah 31:3)

When we reach the New Testament, the love of God is a theme to which Jesus repeatedly returned. In one of the most famous verses in the gospels, Jesus described the incredible love that God has for all that he has made: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

But the Bible is not content simply to describe Yahweh’s character as loving; it goes radically further, teaching that God’s very essence, his very identity is love: “God is love.” (1 John 4:16)

There is a lot packed into those three little words: the Bible teaches that it is not so much that Yahweh *acts* lovingly, but that he *is* loving. Love is not something God *does*: love is something God *is*. This gives Christians tremendous confidence in their ability to trust God, knowing that the heart of his identity is love. It also reveals why the Bible’s teaching that whilst there is one God, he exists in three persons – Father, Son and Spirit (what Christians came to call the Trinity) – is so important. For if God was not triune but single and solitary, it would not be possible for him to be loving without first creating something to love. As Michael Reeves puts it, in his book *Delighting in the Trinity*:

*Such are the problems with nontriune gods and creation. Single-person gods, having spent eternity alone, are inevitably self-centred beings, and so it becomes hard to see why they would ever cause anything else to exist. Wouldn’t the existence of a universe be an irritating distraction for the god whose greatest pleasure is looking in the mirror? ... Everything changes when it comes to the Father, Son and Spirit. Here is a God who is not essentially lonely, but who has been loving for all eternity as the Father has loved the Son in the Spirit. Loving others is not a strange or novel thing for this God at all; it is at the root of who he is.*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Shabbir Akhtar, *A Faith for All Seasons* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990), 180.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 40-41.



When it comes to God and love, this is a common place where people often assume that the great faith traditions of the world are essentially the same. Yet when it comes to Islam, the Qur'an is extremely reticent about talking of Allah and love. In fact the main Arabic word for love, *aḥabba*, is used with Allah as the subject of the verb just 42 times and of those occurrences, 23 are *negative*,<sup>24</sup> the Qur'an describing the kind of people Allah does *not* love. For example:

- God loves not the unbelievers. (Q. 3:32)
- God loves not the prodigal. (Q. 6:141)<sup>25</sup>

The other 19 occurrences are *conditional*,<sup>26</sup> the Qur'an describing the behaviour required to earn Allah's love:

- Surely God loves the doers of good. (Q. 3:148)
- God loves those who fight in His way, (drawn up) in lines (for battle) as if they were a solid building. (Q. 61:4)

The Qur'an simply has no conception of Allah offering anything remotely like an *unconditional* love to humanity. As the Pakistani scholar Daud Rahbar bluntly puts it: "[T]here is not a single verse in the Qur'an that speaks of God's unconditional love for mankind ... [Its verses] do not say that God loves all men."<sup>27</sup>

Faced with this reality, some writers keen to create parallels between Islam and Christianity have tried to square the circle by claiming that whilst the Qur'an speaks little of God's love, it often talks of God's *mercy* – and surely mercy and love are effectively the same.<sup>28</sup> But *are* they?

I live in the countryside and because our house backs onto fields, we often get mice in our garage. After many requests from the younger members of our household, I switched to humane mousetraps and began showing mercy to our furry visitors, rather than killing them. Do I *love* mice? Not a bit of it. I may have shown mercy but love certainly did not come into it. I suggest it is the same for Allah in the Qur'an: yes, he may be described as *merciful* – but this is very different to his being loving. Mercy and love are not interchangeable words.

Drawing out the implications of this, some Muslim scholars have gone so far as to suggest that because the Qur'an speaks so little of Allah's love, because Allah is so transcendent, and because it is crystal clear in the Qur'an that Allah is ruler and master but certainly not a father as God is described in the Bible – because of all this, Muslims should *avoid* using the very word love. The German Muslim scholar Murad Hofmann writes:

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<sup>24</sup> See Q. 2:190, 205, 276; 3:32, 57, 140; 4:36, 107, 148; 5:64, 87; 6:141; 7:31, 55; 8:58; 16:23; 22:38; 28:76-77; 30:45; 31:18; 42:40; 57:23

<sup>25</sup> As Gordon Nickel points out, this is a striking contrast with Jesus's famous story in Luke 15:11-31, where the father (representing God) shows incredible love and forgiveness toward his prodigal son. See Gordon Nickel, 'The Language of Love in Qur'ān and Gospel' in Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala & Angel Urban, eds., *Sacred Text: Explorations in Lexicography* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009) 223-248, citing p. 229.

<sup>26</sup> See Q. 2:195, 222 (twice); 3:31, 76, 134, 146, 148, 159; 5:13, 42, 54, 93; 9:4, 7, 108; 49:9; 60:8; 61:4.

<sup>27</sup> Daud Rahbar, *God of Justice: A Study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 225.

<sup>28</sup> This a major supporting plank of Miroslav Volf's thesis that Yahweh and Allah are the same: see Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperOne, 2011) chapter 8, especially pp. 153-156. Whilst Peters ('The "Same God" Issue') tries somewhat to have his cake and eat it when he writes: "True, mercy is not the same as love, but there is a significant overlap."

*In the Qur'an we are told that Allah is self-sufficient. This fundamental self-description definitely excludes that Allah is in love with his creation ... therefore it is safer and more accurate not speak of 'love' when addressing His clemency, compassion, benevolence, goodness, or mercy.*<sup>29</sup>

### 3. The God of the Bible has suffered

One of the crucial things about love is that it cannot simply be spoken about, rather it must be demonstrated. If somebody says 'I love you' but spends all their time insulting you, throwing rocks at you, or even just entirely ignoring you, then you might justifiably protest: 'You keep using that word, but I do not think it means what you think it means'.<sup>30</sup>

Love needs to be demonstrated, not just verbalised, not least because a major aspect of genuine love is that it is costly. If you truly love another person, you are willing to give of yourself to help them; and if they are hurting, you will grieve and suffer when they suffer.

This brings us to a third characteristic of Yahweh, the God of the Bible, namely that he is a God who has experienced suffering. Time and again we are told that Yahweh grieves over the disobedience, rebellion and brokenness of his people. For example, at the start of the story of Noah we read: "Yahweh was grieved that he had made humankind on the earth and his heart was filled with pain." (Genesis 6:6)

The Hebrew words translated 'grieved' and 'filled with pain' are profoundly emotional words, conveying a deep sense of sorrow.<sup>31</sup>

The theme of God grieving for his people runs throughout the Old Testament and is found in passage after passage, such as these words of great pathos in the book of Hosea, describing Yahweh's love for his people and grief that they have rushed headlong after other gods:

*<sup>1</sup> When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son  
But the more I called Israel,  
the further they went from me.  
They sacrificed to the Baals  
and they burned incense to images.  
...How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel?  
.... My heart is changed within me,  
All my compassion is aroused. (Hosea 11:1-2, 8)*

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<sup>29</sup> Murad Wilfried Hofmann, 'Differences between the Muslim and the Christian Concept of Divine Love' in *14th General Conference of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought* (Amman, Jordan, 2007), 8-9. Discussing the verses (mentioned above) where the Qur'an does use the Arabic word for love, *aḥabba*, Hofmann suggests the word is better translated as 'likes' or 'approves' rather than 'loves'.

<sup>30</sup> With apologies to Inigo Montoya.

<sup>31</sup> See Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 85-86.

Because of Yahweh's love and deep concern, he promises that he will take up our suffering, bear our wounds, and carry our sorrows. In the book of Isaiah, in a famous passage that the New Testament then picks up and applies to Jesus,<sup>32</sup> we read:

*Surely he took up our infirmities,  
and carried our sorrows,  
yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)*

The Bible is very clear that out of Yahweh's love for the people he has made, out of his desire for relationship with humankind; his intention that we should not just know *about* him but know him – that out of these fundamental aspects of God's character comes the plan of salvation that stands at the heart of the Bible's story. Resounding down through the centuries of Old Testament history like a drum beat comes the message that God would save his people and find a way to deal with our rebellion so that we could return to his presence, despite his holiness and our foolishness. That theme of God's acting to save us because we couldn't save ourselves reaches its climax in the person of Jesus, who through suffering demonstrated most clearly and concretely the very character of God:

*Jesus, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!  
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:6-11)*

As the historian and New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham puts it, all the biblical themes about God and suffering come together powerfully in Jesus:

*[Jesus's] humiliation belongs to the identity of God as truly as his exaltation does. The identity of God – who God is – is revealed as much in self-abasement and service as it is in exaltation and*

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<sup>32</sup> See Matthew 8:14-17; Luke 22:35-38; John 12:37-41; Acts 8:26-35; Romans 10:11-21; 1 Peter 2:19-25.

*rule. The God who is high can also be low, because God is God not in seeking his own advantage but in self-giving.*<sup>33</sup>

So what of the Qur'an and this final theme? Does it, too, portray a God who responds to our rebellion not just with judgement and wrath, but who is moved to grief, compassion, and action? In short: no. As one reads the Qur'an, it is clear that human sinfulness and disobedience is a problem, that Allah gets angry at sin, but nowhere is there any hint of sadness or grief.

Consider another biblical story that the Qur'an picks up and retells, reshaping it to fit an Islamic agenda – in this case, the story of Noah and the flood, which is retold in sura 11:25-49. It opens quite differently from the Bible's version, with the Qur'an only mentioning Allah's judgement – indeed, Noah is explicitly told not to be concerned about the disbelievers:

*And it was revealed to Noah: "None of your people will believe, except for the one who has (already) believed, so do not be distressed by what they have done. Build the ship under Our eyes and Our inspiration, and do not address Me concerning those who have done evil. Surely they are going to be drowned." (Q. 11:36-37)*

Unlike the Bible, which repeatedly stresses how Yahweh grieves over his people and is moved to act for their salvation, the Qur'an takes a diametrically different angle, emphasising that Allah is entirely unmoved, even so far as advising the reader not to trouble themselves over the disbelief of unbelievers:

*Do not let those who are quick to disbelieve cause you sorrow. Surely they will not harm God at all. God does not wish to assign to them any share in the Hereafter. For them (there is) a great punishment. (Q. 3:176)*

Reflecting on the Qur'an's understanding that Allah is one who is not loving nor self-giving, but rather one who, by default, responds with power and anger, not ever with grief or sorrow, Muslim scholar Muhammed al-Burkawi writes:

*Allah can annihilate the universe if it seems good to Him and recreate it in an instant. He receives neither profit nor loss from whatever happens. If all the infidels became believers and all the wicked pious He would gain nothing. And if all believers became infidels it would not cause Him loss. He can annihilate even heaven itself.*<sup>34</sup>

## V. Drawing the Threads Together

When it comes to the Qur'an and the Bible and more broadly with Islam's relationship to Christianity, are we dealing with a case of *inheritance* or *borrowing*? Has Islam grown naturally and organically out of Christianity, or did Muhammad (assuming that he was the originator of the Qur'an – a key critical question that we don't have the space to cover here) *borrow* biblical phrases but weave an entirely differently theology around them? What we have seen as we have done a deep dive into the nature of God in the Bible and the Qur'an strongly suggests the latter, with the

<sup>33</sup> Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad al-Burkawi cited in Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God: An Essay of the Character and Attributes of Allah According to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition* (New York: American Tract Society, 1905), 56.

Qur'an offering a radically different view of Allah's nature and character than the Bible offers about Yahweh.

If we had space, we could explore many other theological themes – for example in my book, *Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?* I offer similarly deep dives into the nature of humanity, sin, salvation, forgiveness, and heaven,<sup>35</sup> showing how in each case we see the same pattern: the Qur'an has borrowed biblical phrases and terms, but built an entirely different theology with them. In many ways this should hardly surprise us. Unlike Judaism and Christianity, which are closely related (Jesus was a first-century Jew; most of the first Christians were Jewish, not least Paul who wrote one third of the New Testament; the New Testament quotes or alludes to the Old Testament hundreds of times), the origins of the Qur'an lie six centuries after the New Testament, a thousand miles away, in a cultural context vastly removed from that of the Bible. Whilst there has been Christian and Jewish influence on the formation of the Qur'an,<sup>36</sup> it does not stretch beyond borrowing, the Qur'an picking up biblical words and names in the same way it has borrowed other religious ideas that were circulating in the seventh-century Arabian cultural milieu.<sup>37</sup>

A question I am often asked is “Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?” and whilst there are many layers to that seemingly innocent question, one thing seems increasingly clear: the Qur'an at least has a remarkably different view of the nature, character, and identity of God. And the reason for this is obvious: to return to our earlier linguistics metaphor, what we see in the Qur'an is a theological and religious example of *creolization*. Whilst the Qur'an's superstrate may contain many words borrowed from the Bible, the Qur'an's substrate (its deep meaning and structure) are profoundly different, reflecting most probably their Arabian religious origins. As Durie summarises:

Once we stray beyond what is implied straightforwardly from the idea of one all-powerful creator God, the Qur'an and the Bible diverge considerably.<sup>38</sup>

## VI. *From Theology to Evangelism*

When we think about a question like “Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?” certainly a crucial starting point to answering this is theology – figuring out what the Qur'an says by setting it in its context and milieu. But there are other levels to the question too: namely what do individual Muslims think? Given that a minority of Muslims have actually studied the Qur'an for

<sup>35</sup> Whilst Durie in *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes* also studies prophethood, covenant, and messiahship.

<sup>36</sup> The classic essay that first demonstrated this for Judaism was Abraham Geiger, ‘What did Muhammad borrow from Judaism?’ reprinted in Ibn Warraq, ed., *The Origins of the Koran*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998 [1898], 165-226. Geiger assumes a literary connection between the Qur'an and Jewish traditions, whereas critical scholarship would now recognise (and has extensively mapped the processes) that the influence was primarily oral.

<sup>37</sup> Arguably the most exhaustive of recent studies of the Qur'an's borrowing of biblical ideas is the massive volume by Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). See also the growing list of intertextual connections between the Qur'an and earlier traditions that can be searched at [www.quran-tools.com](http://www.quran-tools.com).

<sup>38</sup> Durie, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes*, 119. See also Durie's book *Liberty to the Captives: Freedom from Islam and Dhimmitude through the Cross* (Melbourne: Deror Books, 2015) for a collection of unique resources (including prayers and liturgy) to help minister to former Muslims who wish to reject the spiritual hold of Islam and embrace the freedom from fear that is offered in Christ.

themselves, it is little wonder that Qur'anic theology and Muslim religious practice do not always align.<sup>39</sup> Thus over almost thirty years of ministry in various forms to Muslims, both in the UK and abroad, I have often met Muslims who have said things like "I believe in a God of love" – even though this is not something the Qur'an would claim.

Much confusion in Muslim-Christian dialogue comes from mixing up the questions "What does the Qur'an say?", "What does later Islamic theology say?", and "What do Muslims actually believe?". But I believe that starting with the Qur'an and its understanding of the nature of God is helpful for a number of reasons. If we ignore Qur'anic theology we risk prioritising our friendships with Muslims. Because we don't want to offend our friends, we tend not to look *too* hard at what the Qur'an says, in case it forces us to ask difficult questions. (One former Muslim friend of mine, now Christian, wryly remarked: "Too many Christian missionaries seem to me to do little more than drink endless cups of tea with Sufi Muslims, as that way they don't have to get into difficult theological debates!")

We risk confusing Muslims. For example, if we don't address the very different view of God in the Bible and the Qur'an, then when we say things like "Jesus is God" our Muslim friend hears this as "Jesus is the Allah of the Qur'an". But given that the Allah of the Qur'an has strongly rejected the Trinity,<sup>40</sup> denied the divinity of Jesus,<sup>41</sup> and is a deity who is remote, transcendent, non-relational, is not loving, and has not suffered that equation makes absolutely no sense. And thus no wonder Muslims struggle with the Trinity. However, by contrast, I have found that if I take the time with a Muslim friend to explore the nature of God, I can sometimes lay the foundations for more fruitful conversations about Jesus and the Trinity.

We risk bending Islam to fit Christianity. Rather than accept that Islam is vastly different, there is a temptation to try to "Christianise" Islam, by papering over differences, misrepresenting Qur'anic passages, changing the meaning of Qur'anic words and so on. Not merely is this dangerous because Muslims may spot this and call it out as another example of "Christian missionaries lying about Islam!" but it is not actually that far removed from the Muslim attempts to do this in reverse; e.g. the many Muslim books and pamphlets that claim that Jesus was a Muslim or that the Bible contains prophecies foretelling Muhammad.<sup>42</sup>

So how should we proceed? I suggest that when dialoguing with Muslim friends or neighbours we remember the importance of asking good questions – after all, this is the evangelistic method that Jesus used so frequently.<sup>43</sup> When your Muslim friend talks about God, don't leap in by immediately proclaiming "You worship a different God!" (nor saying: "Wonderful, we worship the same God!") but what about asking: "Tell me about the God you believe in?" Ask lots of questions,

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<sup>39</sup> The misalignment can sometimes be quite dramatic—for example the practice of praying five times daily that Muslims either undertake or aspire to is not mandated by the Qur'an (which certainly talks about praying, but not five times).

<sup>40</sup> Q. 4:171; 5:73.

<sup>41</sup> Q. 5:116; 19:34-35

<sup>42</sup> See for example Muhammad 'Ata Ur-Rahim, *Jesus: A Prophet of Islam* (London: MWH, 1979); Thomas McElwain, *Islam in the Bible* (Minerva Press, 1998); and Derik Adams, 'Are there Prophecies of Muhammad in the Bible?' ([https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/adams/rebuttals/zawadi/mhd\\_prophecies\\_bible.html](https://www.answering-islam.org/authors/adams/rebuttals/zawadi/mhd_prophecies_bible.html)).

<sup>43</sup> See Conrad Gempf, *Jesus Asked* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003) and Martin B. Copenhaver, *Jesus is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014).

listen well; then as the conversation proceeds, you can segue to: “Some of what you say I would agree with: but the Bible would also say some very different things about God”.

As you converse with Muslims, look out for those in whom the Holy Spirit is already at work – for example the Muslim who says they believe that God is love. Whenever I hear Muslims say something like that, I look for ways to gently suggest that the God they are drawn to is the one found in the Bible. In this situation, we’re in Acts 17 territory –where, you may recall, Paul preaches at the Areopagus and uses the Altar to the Unknown God as a bridge-building point to his audience. But does this give us carte blanche to simply equate gods? Duncan Peters seems to lean that way when he writes: “What is interesting is that Paul does not introduce some entirely new God. He takes the truth they know, however limited it may be, and uses it to build a bridge to communicate the gospel.”<sup>44</sup>

However, Peters misses something crucial: namely that the “Unknown God” which Paul used as a peg to hang his sermon on was *entirely empty of theological content*. After all, why did Paul not use Zeus, or Diana, or Athena – much more well-known gods – why use this minor “Unknown God” in his message? The answer must surely be that Zeus, Diana, Athena or any of more famous members of the Graeco-Roman pantheon had theologies attached to them which did not align with Biblical theology. But the Unknown God was little more than a name; so Paul could fill this empty vessel with theologically rich Biblical content.

I am very much in favour of using an “Acts 17 approach”.<sup>45</sup> Yet we do need to be careful. Rather than announce to Muslims “Let me affirm most of what you believe and just add a little bit more!” we need to lean more towards saying “Your desire to know a God who is love is deeply significant – I don’t think the Qur’an describes Allah that way, but let’s explore this idea of God and love together – not least let’s see what Jesus had to say about it”. In our bridge building, we can certainly *start* from Qur’anic theology; but we want to get away from the Qur’an and its wildly different view of God and get to Jesus as quickly as possible. And as we do that, we can invite our Muslim friends to “Come on home!” to the real and living God, not the shadowy two-dimensional caricature who haunts the pages of the Qur’an. As my dear late friend, the former Muslim Nabeel Qureshi put it in his spiritual autobiography, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*:

*Over the next few days [after my conversion], my heart was filled with a new joy, the joy of meeting God Himself. I thought I had known Him my entire life, but now that I knew who He really was, there was no comparison. Nothing compares to the one true God.*<sup>46</sup>

According to some estimates,<sup>47</sup> there will be 13 million Muslims in the UK by 2050 and so it is vital that as churches, as leaders, and as Christians we take more seriously the task of evangelism among them. That evangelistic task begins with good theology and robust apologetics, but it doesn’t end there. For we need to build friendships, we need to have robust dialogue and debate,

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<sup>44</sup> Peters, “The “Same God” Issue and the Communication of the Gospel to Muslims’, 31.

<sup>45</sup> See Daniel Strange, *Plugged In: Connecting Your Faith With What You Watch, Read, and Play* (Epsom, UK: The Good Book Company, 2019) for multiple examples of how to apply Acts 17 evangelistically to contemporary culture.

<sup>46</sup> Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018) 277, emphasis mine.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Europe’s Growing Muslim Population’, Pew Research Center, 29 November 2017 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/>)

and we need to build bridges –but the whole point of a bridge is to invite your friends to cross it and to come home to the relational, covenant-making, loving, suffering God who revealed himself so uniquely in the person of Jesus.

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# EQUIPPING TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MISSIONARIES FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY

## AFRICAN AND WESTERN REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

*Thorsten Prill*

### *Abstract*

This article discusses the issue of cross-cultural training of both Western Christians who are called to serve as missionaries in Africa and African reverse missionaries who come to Europe and other parts of the world to be involved in evangelistic outreach and church planting. While the value of cross-cultural training for missionaries is widely recognised, both groups tend to demonstrate deficiencies in their cultural intelligence (CQ) which negatively impacts their missionary efforts. This, however, need not be the case. There are various ways in which cross-cultural missionaries can acquire and develop cultural intelligence to become more effective ambassadors of Christ. A solid foundation for mission work abroad is usually laid at home through active involvement in the local church and cross-cultural ministries. Building on that foundation, future missionaries can further increase their cross-cultural competence through short-term mission trips, missionary apprenticeships or formal training at a mission college, preferably outside their home country or in a multicultural and interdenominational setting. Having arrived in their country of service in Africa or Europe, a period of on-field orientation and, at a later stage, participation in continuing education programmes should complement their training.

### *I. Introduction*

While the need for and value of cross-cultural and theological training for missionaries is widely recognised in the church and mission circles,<sup>1</sup> in practice, many Western missionaries today go out ill-equipped for their ministries. John Plake writes that from his personal experience missionaries are aware of their deficiencies and struggle with the consequences:

*During almost nine years of missionary service, I frequently encountered colleagues who were frustrated by the complexities of cross-cultural ministry. Most missionaries expressed confidence in their divine calling and in God's ability to help them; however, they managed the stresses of their work with varying levels of success. Many confided both a suspicion that they were not*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. W.D. Taylor, "Foreword", in R. Brynjolfson & J. Lewis (eds), *Integral Ministry Training: Design and Evaluation* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2006), xiv; J.F. Plake, "Amateurization and Professionalization from the Perspective of Missionary Effectiveness", *Missiology: An International Review* 42, 2 (2014).

*adequately prepared for their work and a desire to understand how they could respond appropriately and intelligently to the cultural dynamics of their situations.*<sup>2</sup>

There are many reasons why missionaries drop out and return home earlier than intended, but inadequate cross-cultural training together with language problems and poor cultural adaptation have been identified as some of the main causes for missionary attrition today.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, deficiencies in cross-cultural competence cannot only be observed among contemporary Western missionaries who serve on the African continent, but also among Africans who are increasingly involved in reverse mission work in Europe and other places outside Africa today. Anderson Moyo, for example, researched the work of Zimbabwean church planters in the English city of Sheffield. He found that the majority of these African missionaries had planted homogenous black churches in overwhelmingly white communities. In other words, their missionary work was not contextually relevant for the majority population. Moyo concludes: "It is apparent from the findings of this study that Zimbabwean reverse missionaries need contextual theological and diasporic cross-cultural training to equip them to minister effectively in culturally diverse environments like Britain."<sup>4</sup> The investigation of Valerie Nkechi Taiwo into 'key cultural competency skills' among British church leaders resulted in similar findings.<sup>5</sup> As part of her studies, she interviewed 100 black Nigerian and white British leaders of Pentecostal churches in eight English counties. Taiwo reports:

*None of the African leaders had had cultural-competency training for a multicultural British society. One had received cross-cultural mission training from white British missionaries while living in rural Northern Nigeria. All the leaders had a good cultural self-identity but they underestimated the influence of the multicultural mix in their churches.*<sup>6</sup>

Without meaningful cross-cultural training and increased levels of cross-cultural competence, African missionaries might continue to successfully establish and grow African congregations in Europe; but they will also continue to struggle in their efforts to reach out to the indigenous European population. Likewise, ill-equipped Western missionaries might make the same or similar cross-cultural mistakes that damaged the ministries of some of their forebearers who served on the African continent in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The mistakes made by some of these pioneers included paternalism: neglecting to develop an indigenous church leadership and imposing Western culture and theology upon the indigenous African population.

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<sup>2</sup> J.F. Plake, *Missionary Expatriate Effectiveness: How Personality, Calling and Learned Competencies Influence the Expatriate Transitions of Pentecostal Missionaries* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Adiwardana, "Formal and Non-formal Pre-field Training: Perspective of the New Sending Countries", in W.D. Taylor (ed), *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997), 208.

<sup>4</sup> A. Moyo, "Church-Planting Considerations for African Reverse Missionaries in Britain in the Postmodern Era", in I.O. Olofinjana (ed), *African Voices: Towards African British Theologies* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2017), 75.

<sup>5</sup> V.N. Taiwo, "Let Us Work Together: Mission Partnership Between Black African Diaspora Churches and White British Churches in the UK", in I.O. Olofinjana (ed), *African Voices Towards African British Theologies* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2017), 208.

<sup>6</sup> Taiwo, "Let Us Work Together", 212.

## II. *Ways Of Equipping African And Western Missionaries*

According to Robert Brynjolfson, “there is no greater challenge in ministry preparation than preparing a person to serve cross-culturally.”<sup>7</sup> If that is the case, we must ask the question, what is the best way to equip those who are called to serve as cross-cultural missionaries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How can they best learn to contextualise themselves and the Christian gospel effectively? The answer to these questions is that there are a variety of ways that can help future missionaries to prepare for cross-cultural gospel work, whether they are Westerners called to serve in the majority world or Africans called to be involved in God’s mission outside Africa.

Key in equipping cross-cultural missionaries is the development of cross-cultural competence or, to use another phrase, cultural intelligence (CQ). David Livermore defines CQ as “both a measurement and a coherent framework for enhancing our ability to cross the chasm of cultural difference effectively, lovingly and respectfully.”<sup>8</sup> According to Livermore, cultural intelligence consists of four factors or dimensions which are interrelated.<sup>9</sup> It measures (a) how far people comprehend cross-cultural issues and differences (knowledge CQ), (b) to what extent people are aware of what is going on as they interact in a different cultural context (interpretive CQ), (c) the degree to which people are interested, driven and motivated to adjust cross-culturally (perseverance CQ), and (d) people’s ability to change their verbal and nonverbal actions as they interact with those from the other culture (behavioural CQ).

David Thomas and Kerr Inkson point out that developing one’s CQ requires learning that is experience-based and takes considerable time and effort.<sup>10</sup> They explain:

*Improving CQ by learning from social experience means paying attention to, and appreciating, critical cultural differences between oneself and others. This requires knowledge about how cultures differ and how culture affects behavior, awareness of cultural cues, and openness to the legitimacy and importance of different behaviour. To retain this knowledge, we must transfer our learning from the specific experience to later interactions in other settings. To reproduce the skills, we need to practice them in future interactions. To reinforce the skills, we need to try out behaviors frequently and mindfully.*<sup>11</sup>

Since gaining cultural intelligence is a long-term process, motivation is critical.<sup>12</sup> For missionaries, this learning process usually begins in their local home church and/or a Christian para-church organisation.

### 1. The strategic role of the local church

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<sup>7</sup> J. Brynjolfson, “The Integral Ministry Training Journey”, in J. Brynjolfson & J. Lewis (eds), *Integral Ministry Training: Design & Evaluation* (Pasadena: William Cary Library, 2006), 9.

<sup>8</sup> D.A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage in Our Multicultural World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2009), 47.

<sup>9</sup> Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 47-48.

<sup>10</sup> D.C. Thomas & K.C. Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence: Surviving and Thriving in the Global Village* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler, 2017), 140.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas & Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas & Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 140.

The initial preparation for any cross-cultural ministry (whether abroad or in one's own country) usually takes place in the context of a local church or para-church organisation, or as Samuel Escobar writes: "The preparation of persons for mission is provided by life experience long before college, university, or mission school offers them information through a curriculum."<sup>13</sup> He continues: "The zeal, the vision, and the basic qualities of character that are the 'raw material' of which missionaries are made, are fostered at home, in churches, and in para-churches."<sup>14</sup> People who are actively involved in their local church as preachers, house-group leaders, Sunday school teachers, to name just a few ministries, tend to have a better understanding of the nature of Christian ministry. They have the first-hand experience of the joys and pains that come with it. Ministry involvement in their local church gives them the chance not only to discover and use their gifts but also to understand their limitations and the limitations of others. It allows them to exercise leadership and to learn from it. It also teaches them that submission is part of the Christian life and ministry. People who struggle with the biblical concept of submission will hardly make good missionaries, or as Ray Porter and Keith Walker note:

*[M]issionaries need to be gospel people and church people. A test of whether they are is their willingness to allow their home church to hold them accountable. Tempting though it may be, wise churches won't send the awkward rebellious ones, but the best ones, the most submissive and loyal.<sup>15</sup>*

In other words, active ministry involvement in the home church helps future missionaries to grow in servanthood and to demonstrate that they are fit for missionary service. Rodolfo Girón writes: "The best missionaries are those who have proven in their home culture that they can minister in a relevant way to other people. Experience provides the kind of informal education that forms more of the good habits and skills that missionaries need."<sup>16</sup> For those who feel that they are called to plant churches in another country, for example, this means that they should seek to get involved in a church planting project in their own country first, or as Steve Hoke and Bill Taylor put it:

*The most relevant preparation for church planting in another culture is significant participation and responsibility on a team establishing Christian community or planting a church at home. Starting evangelistic Bible studies, creating cell groups, raising up leaders from the harvest and discipling new believers to the second and third generation are critical church planting skills.<sup>17</sup>*

Practical ministry experience at home is an essential precondition for any missionary service abroad. The more experience the better. This is also the expectation that many African church leaders have of foreign missionaries. African leaders would like their Western and Asian partners

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<sup>13</sup> S. Escobar, "The Training of Missiologists for a Latin American Context", in J.D. Woodberry, C. Van Engen & E.J. Elliston (eds), *Missiological Education for the Twenty-first Century: The Book, the Circle, and the Sandals* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 105.

<sup>14</sup> Escobar, "The Training of Missiologists for a Latin American Context", 105.

<sup>15</sup> R. Porter & K. Walker, "Mission: No New Crisis", *Evangelicals Now* 26, 1 (2013), 19.

<sup>16</sup> R. Girón, "An Integrated Model of Missions", in W.D. Taylor (ed), *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997), 34.

<sup>17</sup> S. Hoke & B. Taylor, "Your Journey to the Nations: Ten Steps to Help You Get There", in R.D. Winter & S.C. Hawthorne (eds), *Perspectives On The World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 744.

to send their best people. From their point of view what counts is quality and not quantity. Having interviewed East African church leaders and theology students, F. Lionel Young concludes that a new type of missionary is needed for Africa: practitioners with an extensive ministry track record who are willing and able to share their experience with their fellow African believers. Young writes:

*Almost without exception, the students and leaders I talked with, commended the missionaries for their work in bringing the Gospel to Africa, while condemning the same missionaries for their failures in numerous areas, including the lack of preparation they gave to nationals for the ecclesiastical leadership responsibilities that they were eventually (and often reluctantly) given. Yet nearly everyone I interviewed expressed a strong desire to have some type of missionary presence, while arguing that a new breed of missionaries is needed to help Africa to face its complex social problems. Those interviewed repeated the call for trained and seasoned persons with significant ministry experience to be sent as missionaries; they should be "experienced", "educated," and have "proven leadership ability," coupled with a desire to show others how to serve the church effectively. In other words, African leaders and students want accomplished people who are willing to leave position and status, if necessary, to help them provide better leadership for their church.<sup>18</sup>*

#### a) Motives and motivation

When Christians want to become missionaries in a faraway country but have not served in their local church (or in a church plant or parachurch organisation respectively), one has to question their motives and their comprehension of the realities of missionary work. The same is true for those who see missionary service abroad as a chance to escape from difficult situations at home. The problem with such a form of escapism is that they will either not leave their difficulties behind but will take them with them onto the mission field, or find the same kind of 'difficulties' there. It is worth quoting in full what Gailyn Van Rheeën writes about such a wrong motive:

*Some view missionary work as an escape from conservative or lukewarm churches within their own country or from a culture that they consider less than perfect. Their dissatisfaction with the church in their home country prompts them to leave behind a disappointing situation with plans to establish a "perfect" Christian movement in some other area of the world [...] Rejecting one's culture and church situation is both highly idealistic and selfish. Most likely the problems one is escaping will reappear in the new culture, since propensities for nominalism and sin are universal. And no missionary can, in reality, escape the culture that has had a significant molding influence on his life.<sup>19</sup>*

Western missionaries need to have their motives tested and a good place to do that is their local church. The same applies to African Christians who feel called to be involved in God's mission outside Africa. To aspire to a better life in Europe is an understandable desire, but it should never

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<sup>18</sup> F.L. Young III, "A "New Breed of Missionaries": Assessing Attitudes Toward Western Missions at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 36, 2 (2012), 92.

<sup>19</sup> G. Van Rheeën, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 45.

be the driving force for starting a church in Paris, London, Madrid or Berlin. Such an approach can easily result in disappointment and frustration. Experience shows that most African missionaries face enormous social and economic challenges in Western societies. Writing from a Dutch perspective Stefan Paas observes:

*Most members of African churches, including many pastors, work in jobs at the lowest end of the job market. Most also live in lower classes neighbourhoods. Socio-economic issues like income, housing, visas, work permits, medical care, and so on, are often the most pressing ones for them.*<sup>20</sup>

Depending on the context, African missionaries might encounter ethnocentric attitudes and behaviour, sometimes in subtle ways, at other times more openly. Another source of disappointment can be the relationship with local Christians. African missionaries come from societies in which status plays an important role. Back home, pastors are often respected community leaders. However, serving in European countries their experience is often very different. From an African perspective, there seems to be little respect for leaders in general and church leaders in particular. In many European societies, there is a bewildering informality and a general dislike for status symbols. In addition, African missionaries often find themselves in situations where local European church leaders show very little interest in them and their ministries. All this can have a demotivating impact on them. For example, Paas notes “Africans [...] often feel deeply disappointed by the perceived lack of cooperation on the part of Dutch Christians in finding suitable worship space, or in their unwillingness to rent [out] their own buildings to African congregations.”<sup>21</sup> In situations like that, African missionaries need to have the right motivation if they want to persevere.

The right motivation is crucial for any work, but especially for cross-cultural mission. It increases the *perseverance CQ* of missionaries, or as Livermore puts it: “Effective perseverance CQ requires knowing what keeps us going and what slows us down. Cultural intelligence relies on understanding what motivates and drives us, and equally important is knowing what drains and depletes our energy.”<sup>22</sup> In that respect, pre-field local church or para-church ministry in one’s home country is a good training ground for future missionaries. It provides them with opportunities to reflect on their motivation for Christian ministry and, if necessary, to re-think and change it.

But what is it that keeps missionaries going when the going gets tough? In his book *Learning About Mission: Mission Matters* John Brand argues that there are two outstanding biblical motives for missionary service: a passion for God and a passion for people.<sup>23</sup> ‘No Christian’, writes Brand, ‘will ever be truly effective as a missionary unless he has a genuine love and concern for those he seeks to serve.’<sup>24</sup> At the heart of this passion for people lies the biblical truth that anyone who lives and dies without Christ is lost for eternity.<sup>25</sup> While a passion for lost people is a crucial motive for

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<sup>20</sup> S. Paas, “Mission from Anywhere to Europe: Americans, Africans, and Australians Coming to Amsterdam”, *Mission Studies* 32 (2015), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Paas, “Mission from Anywhere to Europe”, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> J. Brand, *Learning About Mission: Mission Matters* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1999), 5-14.

<sup>24</sup> Brand, *Learning About Mission*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Brand, *Learning About Mission*, 10-11.

mission, it is not necessarily the highest one.<sup>26</sup> Missionaries also need to have a passion and enthusiasm for God and his glory. They 'need to become jealous for his glory, even as God is jealous for his own glory.'<sup>27</sup> In contrast to Brand, Van Rheeën argues there are three primary motives of mission: God's love and compassion, his sovereignty over time and the thankfulness of Christians toward God that lead them to devote their lives to doing his will.<sup>28</sup> However, like Brand, Van Rheeën emphasises the centrality of love. Since love is God's outstanding attribute, he argues, it is this very attribute that becomes the main motivation for mission. Van Rheeën writes: 'Just as love compelled God to reconcile sinners to himself, his love propels Christians to minister to those broken by sin, alienated from him, and living without hope in the world.'<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, this is exactly what motivates many African missionaries who serve in the West today. While there is an increasing number of Western missionaries who come to Africa to save people from poor living conditions or to empower them to fight for their rights and free themselves from unjust structures, African missionaries are first and foremost motivated by the spiritual need in Europe. Their main motivation is to help Europeans to be reconciled to God, or as Gerri ter Haar observes:

*Many of the tens of thousands of African Christians who live in Europe regard Western society as a place where people have abandoned God. In their view, Europe is a spiritual wasteland that can be made fertile again with the help from Africa. Just as European missionaries once believed in their divine task of bringing the gospel to Africa, African church leaders in Europe are convinced of their mission to bring the gospel back to those who originally provided them with it. For many African Christians, therefore, migration to Europe is not seen just as an economic necessity, but as a God-given opportunity to evangelize among those whom they believe have gone astray.<sup>30</sup>*

#### b) Spiritual maturity

As important as it is for missionaries to be driven by love and compassion, this motivation alone will not help them to persevere in challenging times. Something else is needed, as the words of Andrew Murray remind us. Over a hundred years ago Murray wrote, "Closely connected to missionary motivation is the deepening of spiritual life."<sup>31</sup> Murray identified "a weak, superficial spiritual life" as the main reason why so many Christians of his time failed to care, give, pray and live for the missionary task.<sup>32</sup> One does not have to agree with all aspects of Murray's view of mission to acknowledge that spiritual maturity is crucial for the Christian missionary endeavour. Can one reasonably expect spiritual immaturity to stand in the face of disheartening set-backs?

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<sup>26</sup> Brand, *Learning About Mission*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Brand, *Learning About Mission*, 13-14.

<sup>28</sup> Van Rheeën, *Missions*, 38.

<sup>29</sup> Van Rheeën, *Missions*, 39.

<sup>30</sup> G. ter Haar, *How God Became African: African Spirituality and Western Secular Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 90.

<sup>31</sup> A. Murray, *The Key to the Missionary Problem: A Passionate Call to Obedience in Action* (Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 2012), 55.

<sup>32</sup> Murray, *The Key to the Missionary Problem*, 66.



Stephen Davis, a former church planter who worked in France and Romania, goes so far as to say that spiritual maturity is the key requirement:

*Churches should encourage excellence in training with an emphasis on spiritual maturity [...] Training must be purposeful in identifying qualities and abilities necessary for spiritual growth and fruitful ministry. Evaluation for ministry must look beyond gifts and skills and place a greater priority on spiritual maturity. We must avoid the mindset that training alone will provide all we need for effective ministry apart from personal spiritual growth in our walk with the Lord. We serve with the conviction that missionary work is ultimately a work of God.<sup>33</sup>*

Spiritually mature missionaries are people who increasingly demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit as the apostle Paul has described it in his letter to the Galatians: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”<sup>34</sup> They know, as Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, that suffering helps them to grow in their faith.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the apostle Peter reminds us of both the foundation of spiritual maturity and the path that leads to it.<sup>36</sup> He writes:

*For this reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance godliness; and to godliness mutual affection; and to mutual affection love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup>*

Spiritual maturity of this kind has certainly a positive impact on the *perseverance CQ* of missionaries. Thus, spiritually mature missionaries are patient with themselves and others. They do not give up when their language learning does not progress the way they wish it would or when doors to promising ministry opportunities are suddenly closed. Importantly, spiritually mature missionaries are not only aware that suffering is part of the Christian life and that God can use the weakness of believers to show his strength, but that is also exactly what they have experienced. Mature missionaries know that the strength they need does not come from within themselves but that it is God who, through his Holy Spirit and the inspired Scriptures, strengthens them spiritually. They know that God is with them and enables them to do what he has called them to do, as Paul describes it in his letter to the Colossians when he writes: “To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.”<sup>38</sup>

Ideally, it is in the context of a local church that future missionaries are discipled and the foundation for spiritual growth and maturity is laid. As part of this process, they are grounded in the Scriptures and the Christian tradition; they learn to have an active prayer life and develop the character traits and routines needed to be enduring, effective ambassadors of Christ. What William Willimon writes about church ministers also applies to cross-cultural missionaries:

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<sup>33</sup> S.M. Davis, *Crossing Cultures: Preparing Strangers for Ministry in Strange Places* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 47.

<sup>34</sup> Galatians 5:22-23.

<sup>35</sup> Romans 5:3-4.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. R.A. Hanson, *Eight Steps to Spiritual Maturity* (Maitland, FL.: Xulon Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>37</sup> 2 Peter 1:5-8.

<sup>38</sup> Colossians 1:29.



*Ministry is difficult. Therefore the great challenge of ministry is to be the sort of characters who can sustain the practices and virtues of ministry for a life time. What we require is some means of keeping at ministry – preparing and delivering sermons, visiting the sick, counseling the troubled, teaching the ignorant, rebuking the proud – even when we don't feel like it, even when it does not personally please us to do so.*<sup>39</sup>

Willimon argues, paradoxically, it is the church that helps ministers to persevere amid the manifold demands of church ministry.<sup>40</sup> It is the rhythm and cycle of corporate worship and prayer, the study of the Bible in preparation for preaching and teaching and prescribed times of rest which form their character and empower them to keep going.<sup>41</sup> This is an important lesson that African and Western churches can teach their future cross-cultural missionaries.

### c) *Missionary call*

Finally, it is the local church that not only provides future missionaries with opportunities for service and spiritual growth but also helps them to explore cross-cultural mission work. Davis argues that local churches need to play a pro-active role in this process. He notes:

*The local church must be invested in training prospective missionaries through involvement in various ministries and growth in godliness that is evident to others. Rather than waiting for volunteers, churches should take the initiative to find and encourage those with required gifts who have proven themselves in ministry.*<sup>42</sup>

The role of the local church must not be underestimated. Ultimately, it is the church that confirms the call of missionaries, sends them out and holds them accountable. This is the model that we find in the early New Testament church. In Acts 13:2-3 Luke gives an account of the call and commissioning of Saul and Barnabas as the first missionaries of the Antiochene church, while in 14:27 we read how the two reported on their missionary journey to the church at their return. Both the confirmation of a missionary call through the church and accountability to the church is essential. There are too many self-appointed lone ranger African and Western missionaries who not only find it difficult to work with one another but also can be disruptive to the ministries of other missionaries and local Christians.<sup>43</sup> Hale notes: "If your call has not been confirmed by at least one mature Christian, you should put it on hold until it has been. There is no place for totally independent missionaries."<sup>44</sup>

## 2. Pre-field involvement in cross-cultural ministry

Another helpful way of preparing for cross-cultural ministry overseas can be some form of prior cross-cultural ministry involvement at home. Experience shows that Western Christians who

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<sup>39</sup> W.H. Willimon, *Calling Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 55.

<sup>40</sup> Willimon, *Calling Character*, 84-85.

<sup>41</sup> Willimon, *Calling Character*, 88.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, *Crossing Cultures*, 28-29.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. T. Hale, *On Being a Missionary* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1995), 19.

<sup>44</sup> Hale, *On Being A Missionary*, 19.

are involved in international student or refugee ministries or have attended an African or Asian ethnic minority church or an international church fellowship in their home country are usually better equipped to serve abroad than those who have no, or only superficial, experience with both Christians and non-Christians from other cultures.<sup>45</sup>

In our globalised world there tends to be an increasing number of cross-cultural ministry opportunities on our doorstep, especially in the West. With the North American context in mind, A. Scott Moreau, Gary Corvin and Gary McGee write:

*[A] prospective missionary should not neglect the fact immigration in North America has brought the world to our door. Field experience among numerous people groups might involve only some investigative work and a short drive. Are you going to minister in a Muslim setting? Look around in your local community to see if there are Muslims with whom you can begin your preparation where you live – some perhaps even from the same country or people group you are interested in. If you start a ministry here, where those you reach are more likely to understand Americans, they can help you learn cultural and communication issues before you leave. The same is true for almost any group you choose, and more so if you live near just about any major city in North America.*<sup>46</sup>

From their interaction with foreigners or national ethnic minorities, future missionaries also gain a better understanding of what it means to live in a dominant culture that is different from their own. Furthermore, it helps them to understand the global character of the church and to experience God in a new way. Harvey Kwiyani, who lectures in African theology in the UK, argues that Christian migrants from the majority world are a divine gift to Western Christianity.<sup>47</sup> Their presence in the West, he writes, “makes cross-cultural exposure possible without the need to travel from one continent to another.”<sup>48</sup> Kwiyani points out that Christian migrants bring with them theologies that are different from traditional Western theologies. He notes:

*All in all, the non-western Christian presence in the West brings Western theologies that informed most of Christianity in the past two millennia into contact with foreign theologies from contexts that have had Christianity for roughly two centuries. Western theologies are thus forced to interact with the many non-Western theologies in their own backyard.*<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, Westerners who feel called to serve in Africa have a unique opportunity to engage with African theological thinking and spirituality and to reflect critically on their theological traditions before they leave to serve in that continent. Attendance at an African church where they can interact with African theologies and worldviews, will help them to develop their *knowledge CQ*. It will help them to understand, for example, why the third person of the Trinity plays such an

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Davis, *Crossing Cultures*, 49.

<sup>46</sup> A.S. Moreau, G.R. Corwin & G.B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 187.

<sup>47</sup> H. Kwiyani, “Pneumatology, Mission and African Christianity in the West”, in I.O. Olofinjana (ed), *African Voices: Towards African British Theologies* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2017), 120.

<sup>48</sup> Kwiyani, “Pneumatology, Mission and African Christianity in the West”, 120.

<sup>49</sup> Kwiyani, “Pneumatology and African Christianity in the West”, 121.

important role in the life of African Christians or why, in some African Christologies, Jesus is presented as healer or ancestor.

African church planters might have to find other ways of learning more about the foreign culture in which they plan to work. If their destination is the UK, France or Germany the international cultural agencies of these countries, i.e. the *British Council*, the *Institut Français* and the *Goethe Institut*, can be helpful points of contact. Cultural institutes like these not only offer language courses but also promote a wider knowledge of their home countries. They allow African missionaries to learn more about Western socio-political views, customs and values. Other sources of learning are Western expatriates and missionaries. The latter in particular can share their understanding of European or American church life and the challenges Christians are facing in their home countries.

As important as such initial cross-cultural contacts are, not all of these contacts are enough to develop profound cross-cultural competence (or cultural intelligence).<sup>50</sup> As Darla Deardorff points out, more is needed than mere contact with people from other cultures to gain such competence. Building authentic relationships that are characterised by respect and trust plays a central role in the cultural learning process.<sup>51</sup> Deardorff continues:

*Research has shown that adequate preparation is necessary to learners' intercultural competence development, especially prior to intercultural experiences such as an international work assignment or education abroad. Intercultural competence doesn't just happen; if it did, there would be far fewer cross-cultural misunderstandings. Rather, we must be intentional about developing learners' intercultural competence.*<sup>52</sup>

This invites the question, what other options do future missionaries have to develop their cultural intelligence in general and their interpretative and behavioural CQ in particular? Short-term mission trips and other forms of formal missionary training listed below provide part of the answer to that question.

### 3. Short-term mission trips

Many scholars emphasise the importance of experiencing foreign cultures for the development of cultural intelligence. Thomas and Inkson, for example, write: "Perhaps the most important means of increasing cultural intelligence is spending time in foreign countries, in which cross-cultural experiences will be frequent and CQ will increase through necessity."<sup>53</sup> For future long-term missionaries, one way of having such experiences of foreign cultures is through short-time mission trips. There are many definitions of short-term when it comes to mission trips.<sup>54</sup> While in the past any assignments up to two years qualified as short-term, today short-term is measured in weeks and months rather than years.

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. D.K. Deardorff, "Preface", in D.K. Deardorff (ed), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2009), xiii.

<sup>51</sup> Deardorff, "Preface", xiii.

<sup>52</sup> Deardorff, "Preface", xiii.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas & Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 242.

<sup>54</sup> J. Mack & L. Stiles, *Mack & Leeann's Guide to Short-term Missions* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 11.

Short-term mission trips have been very popular in Europe and North America for the last two decades.<sup>55</sup> Writing from an American perspective, Laurie Occipinti argues that “[s]hort term missions have become a part of the fabric of our contemporary religious and social landscape.”<sup>56</sup> Christians see short-term mission trips as an opportunity to do something meaningful in a way that does not seem possible in their daily lives.<sup>57</sup> Participants of short-term mission trips, Occipinti believes, “want the work they do and the sacrifices they make to be effective, to make a genuine difference, and to create the change they envision.”<sup>58</sup>

While recognising this motivation, for many mission organisations short-term trips serve additional purposes. Mission organisations organise short-term trips to raise awareness for their global work, to strengthen relations with existing supporters, to win new supporters and to give potential long-term missionaries first-hand mission experience. In particular, the function of short-term missions as a taster for would-be missionaries (“short-term before long-term”) should not be underestimated.<sup>59</sup> Evelyn Hibbert, Richard Hibbert and Tim Silberman note: “Being exposed to the world and its needs is an important step in many people’s journey to becoming long-term missionaries. A key way of bringing this exposure is to provide short-term mission trips overseas.”<sup>60</sup> But can short-term mission trips help to increase people’s CQ and contribute to the preparation of future long-term cross-cultural workers, as some authors suggest?<sup>61</sup>

While David Livermore agrees that overseas experience is essential for developing cultural intelligence, he is highly critical of study-abroad tours or short-term mission trips, where groups of people of the same cultural background travel together.<sup>62</sup> “Such trips”, Livermore writes, “usually lead us to process the experience with people like ourselves rather than with the Other.”<sup>63</sup> Instead, people should travel on their own or together with some significant others and make use of cultural guides, Livermore recommends. Having studied the thinking and behaviour among American participants of short-term mission trips, Livermore formulates four additional points of criticism. Firstly, he argues that mission trips do not have a lasting impact on the paternalistic and ethnocentric attitude of short-term missionaries: “The study indicated participants’ ethnocentrism was found to be significantly lower at the end of the trip than it was at the beginning. However, when tested more longitudinally, the lowered ethnocentrism was not sustained.”<sup>64</sup> Secondly,

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<sup>55</sup> A.S. Moreau, G.R. Corwin & G.B. McGee. *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 191.

<sup>56</sup> L.A. Occhipinti. *Making A Difference in a Globalized World: Short-term Missions that Work* (Lanham: Rowland & Littlefield, 2014), 4.

<sup>57</sup> Occhipinti. *Making A Difference in a Globalized World*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Occhipinti. *Making A Difference in a Globalized World*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. M.S. Wilder & S.W. Parker, *Transformission: Making Disciples Through Short-terms Missions* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 49-50; Moreau, Corwin & McGee. *Introducing World Missions*, 191.

<sup>60</sup> E. Hibbert, R. Hibbert & T. Silberman, “Mobilizing New Missionaries”, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 52, 2 (2016), 178.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, S. Hoke & B. Taylor, “Your Journey to the Nations: Ten Steps to Help You Get There”, in R.D. Winter & S.C. Hawthorne (eds), *Perspectives On The World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 743.

<sup>62</sup> Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 253.

<sup>63</sup> Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence*, 253.

<sup>64</sup> D. Livermore, “Cultural Intelligence and Short-term Missions: The Phenomenon of the Fifteen-Year-Old Missionary”, in S. Ang & L. Van Dyne (eds), *Handbook of Cultural Intelligence: Theory, Measurement, and Applications* (Armon: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 274.

Livermore's findings suggest that ethnocentrism is aggravated by the categorical thinking of North American short-term missionaries.<sup>65</sup> Despite the huge cultural differences that short-term missionaries encountered, they first and foremost talked about the similarities between their own culture and the host culture instead of the differences. This, Livermore points out, is a typical coping mechanism for cross-cultural travellers.<sup>66</sup> Thirdly, the material poverty which short-term missionaries encounter during their visits tends to dominate their experience. While the levels of poverty can be devastating, short-term missionaries overlook that the people of their host cultures are often rich in other ways.<sup>67</sup> Livermore states: "In a spirit of mutuality, short-term teams need to learn to give in ways that do not perpetuate the tired power structures of colonialism while also learning to receive from the plenty that exists in the communities they visit."<sup>68</sup> Finally, the short-term missionaries are often narrow categorisers who are not aware of the cultural lenses through which they read and interpret the ethical norms found in the Bible.<sup>69</sup> Livermore explains: "Most subjects missed out on the rich hermeneutical treasure that exists in encountering fellow Christians in other parts of the world, who hold to some similar presuppositions of Jesus' moral teaching but often interpret its application in very different ways."<sup>70</sup>

Research into the impact of short-term mission trips on young Christians by Randall Friesen, however, shows that participants of such trips usually experience growth in their appreciation of the global church, their concern for global issues and their respect for other cultures.<sup>71</sup> Other studies support these results. Michael Wilder and Shane Parker note: "Studies also indicate that there is often a modification in one's global perspective. Cultural sensitivity is usually increased and ethnocentrism decreased as a result of the intercultural experience."<sup>72</sup> According to Friesen, the length and set up of short-term mission trips are crucial: longer assignments in which participants live with indigenous families and learn the local language, contribute "to deeper and more lasting changes in participants' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours."<sup>73</sup> In addition, Friesen found that short-term mission participants who are part of a team experience significantly greater growth in these areas than participants who go out on their own. He explains:

*Participants who served on teams had an easier time processing their disappointments on their assignments related to the local church, ministry or culture they were experiencing. Participants serving on assignments as individuals learned independence and resilience, but their limited access to settings where they could open up their lives meant that difficulties sometimes resulted in ongoing frustration and unresolved conflict.<sup>74</sup>*

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<sup>65</sup> Livermore, "Cultural Intelligence and Short-term Missions", 275.

<sup>66</sup> Livermore, "Cultural Intelligence and Short-term Missions", 275.

<sup>67</sup> Livermore, "Cultural Intelligence and Short-term Missions", 277.

<sup>68</sup> Livermore, "Cultural Intelligence and Short-term Missions", 277.

<sup>69</sup> Livermore, "Cultural Intelligence and Short-term Missions", 278.

<sup>70</sup> Livermore, "Cultural Intelligence and Short-term Missions", 278.

<sup>71</sup> R.G. Friesen. *The Long-term Impact of Short-term Missions on the Beliefs, Attitudes and Behaviours of Young Adults*, unpublished doctoral thesis (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2004), 218.

<http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/1890/thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; Date of Access: 30.09.2021.

<sup>72</sup> Wilder & Parker. *Transformission*, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Wilder & Parker. *Transformission*, 219.

<sup>74</sup> Wilder & Parker. *Transformission*, 220.

Approximately fifty percent of the young adults who took part in Friesen's study became more interested in future cross-cultural mission work during the year following their return home.<sup>75</sup> This is in line with other studies that indicate that participants return from short-term mission trips with a great openness to be actively involved in global mission work.<sup>76</sup> Friesen's research, however, also shows that many young Christians experience a significant decline both in their relationship with their home church and in the spiritual disciplines of Bible study and prayer in the year following their return from the mission field.<sup>77</sup> Friesen concludes that "[d]iscipleship training before and after a short-term mission is critical to the overall impact of the mission experience."<sup>78</sup> Friesen's conclusion is supported by Tim Dearborn who writes that the long-term impact on short-termers' lives depends on the quality of their debriefing and the integration of their experience into their lives.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Terry Linhart, who studied a student group that went on a short-term mission trip, notes: "[W]ithout extending careful support and feedback post-trip, the seeds of mission and service planted in the students' lives during a short-term trip may never mature."<sup>80</sup> Brian Howell suggests a series of follow-up meetings that help participants to review what they have learned, how the mission trip has affected them and how it has changed their thinking and behaviour.<sup>81</sup> To prepare them before they go out he recommends, if possible, inviting a person from the country the group is going to visit.<sup>82</sup> This person, Howell argues, could bring his or her perspective on the country, its culture and history. He continues:

*If the group could do a bit of reading and prepare questions, that would help engage a visitor, but at the very least it would open up ways of speaking about what is happening in the country (politically, spiritually, economically) in ways that are both personal and relevant.*<sup>83</sup>

Finally, ministry placements for short-termers need to be chosen wisely – not only for their own sake but also for the sake of local people. Placements should not demand too much of short-termers. Expectations that short-termers cannot meet can easily result in frustrations and a sense of failure and learned helplessness. At the same time, it can be a frustrating experience for young Africans to see that eighteen or nineteen-year-old Europeans or Australians are placed to teach in local schools while they, though having graduated with a teaching degree from a university, cannot find any employment in this area due to economic crisis and budgetary cuts. The same applies to African Bible college or seminary graduates who are told that a group of high school graduates from Korea or the US has come to their church to teach them how to reach out to African children and teenagers.

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<sup>75</sup> Wilder & Parker, *Transformission*, 223.

<sup>76</sup> Wilder & Parker, *Transformission*, 66-70.

<sup>77</sup> Wilder & Parker, *Transformission*, 225.

<sup>78</sup> Wilder & Parker, *Transformission*, 227.

<sup>79</sup> T. Dearborn, *Short-terms Missions Workbook: From Mission Tourists to Global Citizens* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 22.

<sup>80</sup> T.D. Linhart, "Planting Seeds: The Curricular Hope of Short Term Mission Experience in Youth Ministry", *Christian Education Journal* 3, 2 (2005), 264.

<sup>81</sup> B.M. Howell, *Short-term Mission: An Ethnography of Christian Travel Narrative and Experience* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 233.

<sup>82</sup> Howell, *Short-term Mission*, 232.

<sup>83</sup> Howell, *Short-term Mission*, 232.

To sum up, one can say that short-term mission trips have the potential to help future missionaries to develop their cultural intelligence provided that the set-up is right. Short-termers need to be given enough opportunities to learn language and culture. “[L]anguage and culture are much more than a prerequisite to ministry; it is the first step and a solid foundation for almost any ministry one can envision. Such learning establishes rapport, builds relationships, and communicates the respect that opens up multiple doors of opportunity.”<sup>84</sup> In addition, participants in short-term mission trips need appropriate support before and after the trip if their experience is to have a lasting positive effect on their lives and mission involvement.

At this point, it has to be said that, in general, global short-term mission trips are something for materially privileged Christians from Europe, North America or parts of Asia. For most Africans, such trips are simply not affordable. This does not mean that African Christians cannot go on short-term mission trips at all. Travelling to another part of one’s home country or across the border to a neighbouring country and serving another African people group can be a very enriching experience. This is true for a Namibian church choir that helps to erect a church building across the border in rural Angola, or for a group of Bible college students from South Africa who run a children’s holiday club together with a church in Botswana.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought not only tourism to a standstill in many countries but also short-term mission trips. At this point in time, it is difficult to say what short-term mission will look like after the pandemic. In the meantime, it gives Western and African churches and mission organisations the chance to rethink and, if necessary, reshape the way they want to use short-term mission trips as a means of developing CQ in the future.

#### 4. Missionary apprenticeships

According to Thomas and Inkson, living and working abroad for an extended time provides people with opportunities for intense cross-cultural experiential learning.<sup>85</sup> Living and working in a foreign culture is an important way of increasing CQ. However, this is not an automatic process. People need to interact with their host culture, have the opportunity to practice mindfulness, and acquire cross-cultural skills. To provide their staff with opportunities to develop their CQ in a foreign context, Thomas and Inkson note that some large companies, “use global experiential programs in which high-potential employees work in multicultural groups to solve problems in developing countries.”<sup>86</sup>

Some evangelical mission organisations have adopted a similar approach for the training of future missionaries by developing various forms of missionary apprenticeships. *Training in Missionary Outreach* (TIMO), for example, is a two to three-year programme that has been designed by Africa Inland Mission International (AIM) to equip Christians for long-term ministry in Africa and among the African diaspora in other parts of the world. This is how AIM describe their programme which has a focus on church planting:

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<sup>84</sup> Moreau, Corwin & McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 209-210.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas & Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 148.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas & Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 148.



*TIMO brings teams of 3 to 12 new missionaries into places of engagement with Africa's unreached people groups. With the guidance of an experienced team leader, and at times, working with the national church partners, each team sets out to learn language and culture as they work through TIMO's specialized curriculum [...] Timo provides practical hands-on training while engaging in real, transformational ministry.*<sup>87</sup>

Such a 'training-on-the-job' approach can positively influence the development of CQ, particularly interpretative and behavioural CQ, as trainee missionaries are directly exposed to an African culture where they have to live and serve. Their focus is on learning a new language and cultural norms, building relationships with local people, and finding ways of sharing the good news of Jesus with them. However, for such a programme to be successful it also requires the participants to already possess some degree of cultural intelligence, especially if their team is made up of people of different cultural backgrounds. To work and study in an African context far away from home is challenging, but to do so as part of a multicultural team is even more challenging. The issues that can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts within multi-cultural mission teams are many.<sup>88</sup> For example, team members might have different communication and leadership styles, hold different views on worship, evangelism and church planting, or differ in their understanding of personal space and time. For this reason, apprenticeship programmes like AIM's TIMO should not be seen as a substitute for pre-field cross-cultural training. At best they can only complement such training.

## 5. Formal multi-cultural missionary training

Research among business students shows that cross-cultural management (CMM) courses taught either at undergraduate or postgraduate level have a positive impact on the students' CQ. Marie-Therese Claes writes the following about the findings of a study she has been involved in:

*We found that CQ indeed can be enhanced via training and experience. For, instance, our study showed that CCM courses act as "experience equalizers", allowing students with less international experience to catch up with their well-traveled peers, thus minimizing the cultural competence gap between the two groups. More important, we found that after students took CCM courses, their overall CQ was higher, particularly in the areas of cognitive and metacognitive CQ.*<sup>89</sup>

These findings remind us, formal education at a theological or missionary training college has a critical place in equipping cross-cultural missionaries. In addition to classical theological subjects like Biblical studies, systematic theology, pastoral ministry and church history, future missionaries need in-depth theoretical and practical training in the area of missiology and intercultural studies to develop their CQ.

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<sup>87</sup> Africa Inland Mission International, "TIMO: Equipping People for Missions", [aimint.org/discover-timo/](http://aimint.org/discover-timo/); Date of access: 20.11.2021.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Y.J. Cho & D. Greenlee, "Avoiding Pitfalls in Multi-Cultural Mission Teams", *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, 4 (1995), 180-182.

<sup>89</sup> M.-T. Claes, "Learning Other Cultures", *BizEd* 19, 2 (2020), 50.



Most colleges and schools, whether secular or Christian, provide cross-cultural training that is factual, analytical and experiential. Thomas and Inkson point out that in general the latter tends to be the most effective one, as it provides “[o]pportunities to practice both mindfulness and behaviour skills, and to experience the emotions of cross-cultural interaction.”<sup>90</sup> In the context of a theological or missionary college, experiential training may take the form of roleplaying, short-term overseas placements, involvement in local cross-cultural mission projects or local ethnic-minority churches. Another important aspect of formal cross-cultural training should be the acquisition and practice of foreign languages. Language learning, as Claes reminds us, can help students to develop their CQ.<sup>91</sup> She explains: “We know that bilinguals see the world through two different conceptual systems, which enhances their cognitive flexibility, divergent thinking, and creativity.”<sup>92</sup>

However, as Birgit Herppich’s research into the preparation of missionaries of the Basel Mission in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has shown, community-focused missionary training can be problematic if missionary candidates “essentially share commonly agreed theological convictions, norms of ethical behavior, preferences of social organization, values, attitudes, and perceptions of Christian mission.” Herppich explains that such training “aims to preserve and establish the religious and socio-ethical values, emphases, and practices of a particular constituency which potentially prevents the cultural competence (flexibility to adjust and work in other cultural contexts) that should be its aim.”<sup>93</sup> Consequently, the results of Herppich’s study seem to support those who argue that cross-cultural ministry preparation is more effective when missionary candidates who train together come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Put differently, missionaries who train at an interdenominational and multi-ethnic missionary training institute or training community tend to be better prepared for their task than those who receive their training at institutions with a rather homogenous student and teaching body.

This view is shared by Dietrich Kuhl who writes that “[a] multicultural student body and teaching staff seem to be ideal for cross-cultural missionary training.”<sup>94</sup> David Tai-Woong Lee who writes about the philosophy of missionary training in the Asian context explains: “Multi-racial groups with multi-racial trainers provide an excellent atmosphere for informal as well as formal learning opportunities for cross-cultural living and ministry.”<sup>95</sup> Lee continues to argue that global trends in mission demand such a multi-cultural training approach. “More and more Asian missionaries”, he writes, “will have to minister side-by-side with Western missionaries or other non-Western missionaries sent from Asia and other Two-Thirds world sending countries.”<sup>96</sup> The same point is made by Lianne Roembke, who argues that training in a multi-cultural context is

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas & Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 143.

<sup>91</sup> Claes, ‘Learning Other Cultures’, 50.

<sup>92</sup> Claes, ‘Learning Other Cultures’, 50.

<sup>93</sup> B. Herppich, “Cultural Bias in Missionary Education: The Unintentional Dynamic of Trained Incapacity”, in R.A. Danielson & B.L. Hartley (eds), *Transforming Teaching for Mission: Educational Theory and Practice* (Wilmore: First Fruits Press, 2014), 213.

<sup>94</sup> D. Kuhl, “Towards Interdependent Partnership: WEC in Multiple Partnerships”, in W.D. Taylor (ed), *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1994), 222.

<sup>95</sup> D.T. Lee, “Training Cross-Cultural Missionaries from the Asian Context: Lessons Learned from the Global Missionary Training Centre”, *Missiology* 1 (2008), 112-113.

<sup>96</sup> Lee, “Training Cross-Cultural Missionaries from the Asian Context”, 113-114.

particularly helpful for missionaries who are going to serve in multi-cultural mission teams. She states:

*This “reality training” helps the candidates keep uppermost in their mind that they are going to be working with such a conglomerate group, even if the future composition may be different. Learning sensitivity to teammates during training may help eliminate unpleasant surprises later.*<sup>97</sup>

Training that exposes African and Western missionary candidates to different church traditions, worldviews, and cultural norms and values, and experiencing cross-cultural misunderstandings and even conflicts with fellow students and teaching staff, can help them to increase their CQ. The value of culturally mixed groups for cross-cultural training is also recognised by secular training institutions. Claes notes: “Some schools also promote CQ by creating class situations with mixed groups learning alongside one another. These settings make students aware of their own and others’ cultures.”<sup>98</sup>

Training in a multi-cultural context over a longer period of one or two years teaches future missionaries humility and patience, as well as the importance of mutual trust. In other words, it contributes to their character formation, which, as David Harley notes, is a significant aspect of mission training: “Missionaries must not only preach about the love of God; they must demonstrate the love of God in their lives. They must not just talk about Jesus; they must reflect His character.”<sup>99</sup>

Finally, in an age in which the centre of gravity of global Christianity has shifted to Africa, Asia and South America, Western missionary candidates should also consider training for ministry in these parts of the world. Studying under African theologians, alongside African students at an African theological seminary can be an invaluable experience for future missionaries. Not only will they learn what pastoral ministry, evangelism or spiritual warfare in an African context mean, they will also get the first-hand experience of the many challenges which their fellow students, their families, churches and communities face. Having received their training not at a prestigious institution in Australia, Europe or North America but a theological college in rural Kenya or urban Nigeria will give them credit with African Christians, as this step communicates humility and a willingness to come to Africa as a learner.

Likewise, African church planters who come to Europe or North America should consider doing some full-time or part-time training at a local theological college (if visa regulations allow them to do so and their financial situation is such that they can afford it). If possible, African missionaries should choose colleges that offer an ethnic and denominational mix among the student body and lecturing staff to benefit most from such training. Attending a black Pentecostal college in the UK might be tempting but could, as Herppich’s studies indicate, be counterproductive. Alternatively, they should consider taking part in short-term seminars and workshops offered by theological colleges and organisations such as the *Centre for Missionaries from the Majority Church* in the UK that help them to get a better grip of post-Christian Western worldviews, cultures and mission strategies.

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<sup>97</sup> L. Roembke. *Building Credible Multicultural Teams* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), 205.

<sup>98</sup> Claes, “Learning Other Cultures”, 50.

<sup>99</sup> C.D. Harley, *Preparing to Serve: Training for Cross-cultural Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1995), 81.

## 6. On-field orientation

Over sixty years ago, Maurice Heusinkveld published an article in the *International Review of Mission* in which he passionately pleaded for an intensive on-field-orientation for missionaries. Heusinkveld criticised the attitude which saw language learning as “the main final preparation” for cross-cultural workers.<sup>100</sup> He pointed out that missionaries having completed their language studies were usually appointed to their new ministries without having been assigned a personal tutor or orientated to field problems. This lack of preparation, Heusinkveld wrote, caused a lot of frustration among missionaries. He, therefore, argued for the establishment of new field committees to support new missionaries in the early stage of their ministry. These committees, Heusinkveld suggested, “should be composed of senior missionaries who have made a good field adjustment and are known to have been of real help to others in their orientation period; people with special interest in this field; doctors, nurses, pastors, with training in counselling, psychiatry or pastoral counselling.”<sup>101</sup>

Today the importance of on-field orientation that goes beyond language study is widely recognised in Western mission circles. The goal of such an orientation is to help missionaries in their cross-cultural adjustment. The latter is defined by Christina Yu-Ping Wang and her co-authors as the ability of expatriates “to fit into the local work and nonwork environment while reducing stress and increasing their effectiveness at work.”<sup>102</sup> Wang and her fellow researchers contend that there are three aspects of cross-cultural adjustment: work adjustment (adaption to responsibilities), life adjustment (adaption to local food, shopping, banking, etc.), and cultural adjustment (adaption to local values, norms, and ways of communication).

To increase its effectiveness, on-field orientation should not solely rely on other missionaries, as Heusinkveld seems to suggest, but also include local people. Some mission organisations, therefore, require new missionaries to live with local African families or shadow local pastors or bible college lecturers for some time. In addition, on-field orientation should include seminars and discussion forums with local community leaders and experts on relevant socio-political issues such as HIV-Aids, poverty, gender-based violence, ethnocentrism, etc.<sup>103</sup>

Research into on-field orientation for new missionaries carried out by John Basham demonstrates the importance of involving local people in these programmes. Basham researched how long-term American missionaries perceived the on-field orientation they had received in the East African countries of Kenya and Tanzania and found the following:

*Meeting locals within the first few days and beginning a process of understanding them and their culture was viewed as extremely important. Many reported that it was the early relationships with locals within their context that tended to sustain them and keep them going.*

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<sup>100</sup> M. Heusinkveld, “The New Missionary Committee and Field Orientation”, *International Review of Mission* 46, 183 (1957), 283.

<sup>101</sup> Heusinkveld, “The New Missionary Committee and Field Orientation”, 286.

<sup>102</sup> C.Y.-P. Wang, M.-C. Lien, B.-S. Jaw, C.-Y. Wang, Y.-S. Yeh & S.-H. Kung, “Interrelationship of Expatriate Employee’s Personality, Cultural Intelligence, Cross-Cultural Adjustment, and Entrepreneurship”, *Social Behavior and Personality* 4, 12 (2019), 4.

<sup>103</sup> See also J.J. Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem – Revisited* (New Haven: Overseas Ministries Study Center, 2007), 171.

*Some stated that these early local relationships were equally and many times more important than the relationships developed within their missionary family. Learning from locals, learning how to learn from locals and learning the right types of questions to even ask locals was spoken of very highly by the participants.*<sup>104</sup>

The results of Moyo's research seem to indicate that not many African missionaries who serve in the West have received any meaningful on-field orientation as described above. Moyo found that Zimbabwean missionaries to the UK "have met a myriad of obstacles in their various magnanimous evangelistic attempts among the white population."<sup>105</sup> Cultural and social stumbling blocks, he explains, "have weakened the impact of the majority of Zimbabwean diaspora churches, which are still using mission strategies exported from the homeland that lack a cross-cultural appeal in Britain."<sup>106</sup>

## 7. Continuing cross-cultural ministry training

Continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, that aim to enhance people's knowledge, skills and attitudes can be found in many industries, including the public sector. In the teaching sector, for example, there is a wide range of CPD models that are used today.<sup>107</sup> These include the training model, the award-bearing model, the deficit model, the standards-based model, the coaching/mentoring model and the community of practice model, to name just a few. Since the development of cross-cultural intelligence is a lifelong process, continuing training in this area is imperative.<sup>108</sup> In an article entitled 'Integral Training Today for Cross-cultural Mission' Darrell Whiteman argues that there is a need to develop CPD programmes for missionaries too. What Whiteman has in mind are forms of training and education that equip missionaries "with ethnographic research skills so that they can continue to learn from and understand the changing culture where they serve."<sup>109</sup> He then goes on to explain why such training for serving missionaries is essential: "Without some form of continuing education and training our culture and language learning is likely to plateau and we won't get to the depths of understanding or linguistic competence that we need."<sup>110</sup>

While Whiteman's call for the continuing education of missionaries is rather general, Evelyn and Richard Hibbert favour a particular model. To nurture reflective mission practitioners they suggest the formation of missiological communities of practice. They write:

*In order to learn – to become more competent at their task – members of a missiological community of practice meet together to talk about the enterprise (missions) they are concerned*

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<sup>104</sup> J.J. Basham, *A Study of the Perceptions of Career American Missionaries in the Countries of Kenya and Tanzania Relating to Their Overseas Field-Based Orientation Experiences*, unpublished Doctor of Education thesis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2009), 212.

<sup>105</sup> Moyo, "Church-Planting Considerations for African Reverse Missionaries in Britain in the Postmodern Era", 72.

<sup>106</sup> Moyo, "Church-Planting Considerations for African Reverse Missionaries in Britain in the Postmodern Era", 72.

<sup>107</sup> A. Kennedy, "Models of Continuing Professional Development: A Framework for Analysis", *Journal of In-service Education* 31, 2 (2005), 236-237.

<sup>108</sup> Deardorff, "Preface", xiii.

<sup>109</sup> D.L. Whiteman, "Integral Training Today for Cross-cultural Mission", *Missiology* 36, 1 (2008), 5-16, 13.

<sup>110</sup> Whiteman, "Integral Training Today for Cross-cultural Mission", 14.

*about and engaged in. They help each other solve problems that arise as they go about engaging in missions, and they share information, insights, and advice. They think together about common issues and explore ideas and new ways of doing things. They hone their understanding of their task by generating multiple perspectives on their task and work to reconcile conflicting perspectives. Over time they develop a shared perspective on their specific missions context and a body of shared stories, knowledge, approaches, and practices.*<sup>111</sup>

Hibbert and Hibbert argue that such missionary learning communities have several advantages over other professional development models.<sup>112</sup> Accordingly, their focus is on practical mission work and collective, holistic learning.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, learning communities are very accessible to missionaries, encourage life-long learning and provide contextualised learning experiences.<sup>114</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that thanks to video conferencing tools, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, meeting others and learning together even over great distances is possible. The Church Mission Society, an agency connected with the Church of England, has introduced missionary communities of practice. Evelyn and Richard Hibbert comment:

*The purpose of these communities is to enable missionaries to learn from one another through discussion of issues, problems and their solutions, ideas, lessons learned, and research findings. Members of these communities are expected to share what they learn with others, and it is anticipated that this will "generate innovation and creativity in the practice of mission".*<sup>115</sup>

### III. Limitations Of Cross-Cultural Preparation and Training

While it is essential for Christians who want to serve as cross-cultural missionaries to undergo thorough preparation, practical cross-cultural experience and formal training are no guarantee that they will increase their CQ in all its facets and become effective in their future ministries. Missionaries may have gone through the best training available but are still struggling to relate to the people they have come to serve after years of working on their African or European mission fields. As a result, they decide to give up and return home, ask to be transferred to another country, or just remain in an expatriate mode. As Davis has pointed out there are many factors, such as personality and personal giftedness, which play a role in the development of cross-cultural intelligence.<sup>116</sup> Thomas and Inkson explain:

*Some characteristics that individuals already possess or can develop make them more willing and better able to increase their cultural intelligence. For example, personality traits such as openness to new experience, extroversion, and agreeableness, improve the capacity to acquire the necessary skills. Again, mindfulness is key because, combined with the active pursuit of*

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<sup>111</sup> R. Hibbert & E. Hibbert, "Nurturing Missionary Learning Communities", Workshop Paper, 2014 APM Annual Meeting St Paul, MN (-: First Fruits Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>112</sup> Hibbert & Hibbert, "Nurturing Missionary Learning Communities", 8.

<sup>113</sup> Hibbert & Hibbert, "Nurturing Missionary Learning Communities", 8-9.

<sup>114</sup> Hibbert & Hibbert, "Nurturing Missionary Learning Communities", 9-10.

<sup>115</sup> Hibbert & Hibbert, "Nurturing Missionary Learning Communities", 11.

<sup>116</sup> Davis, *Crossing Cultures*, 19.

*opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, it lays a foundation for developing greater cultural intelligence.*<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, cross-cultural training and experience will not keep missionaries from going through times of emotional exhaustion and conflict, but hopefully, their knowledge and previous experience of cultural shock will help them to cope with the challenges presented to them. Neither will formal and informal training prevent missionaries from making mistakes. These mistakes might cause them to feel inadequate at times, but they are part of their learning process. Over time they will make fewer mistakes and feel more secure in their host culture if they exercise patience, kindness, self-control and forgiveness. Finally, having been exposed to other cultures and received cross-cultural training does not mean that missionaries can or should serve anywhere in the world. Missionaries need to accept that depending on their spiritual gifts, talents, health conditions or family situations, they may be more suitable for some ministries and cultural contexts than for others.

#### IV. Conclusion

Possessing and developing cultural intelligence is essential for both Western missionaries serving in Africa and their African counterparts who work outside their home continent in Europe and other parts of the world. Deficiencies in cross-cultural competence reduce not only their effectivity but also cause frustration and are one of the main reasons why missionaries return home prematurely or end up leading expatriate lives with little meaningful interaction with the indigenous population. There are, however, many ways how African and Western missionaries can develop their CQ and seek to be better equipped for their ministries. Active involvement in a local church and pre-field cross-cultural ministries in their home countries play a crucial role here, as they help Christians to grow spiritually and test their motivation and missionary calling. Other ways of equipping future mission workers include short-term mission trips to neighbouring countries or places further afield, missionary apprenticeships and formal mission training, preferably at interdenominational colleges with a multicultural student body and staff team. Once having entered the country of service, an initial programme of field orientation and at a later stage participation in continuing training programmes such as missionary communities of practice can contribute to the increase of knowledge, perseverance, interpretative and behavioural CQ of 21<sup>st</sup> century cross-cultural ambassadors of Christ.

### About the author

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<sup>117</sup> Thomas & Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence*, 138.

# A MISSIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE INSIDER MOVEMENT

*Hicham El Mostain*

## *Abstract*

This paper addresses Insider Movements (IMs) within the world of Islam and presents a missiological evaluation of the principal IM paradigms. A definition of the movement will be given and discussed. We will also consider five major controversial areas that summarise the debate: 1) The legitimacy of IM members' dual Islamic and Christian identity, 2) The openness of 'Insiders' towards the prophethood of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, 3) The Qur'an as Scripture, 4) The new translation of the Bible, and 5) The role of the local Church. The results of the preceding analyses will be synthesised, conclusions regarding the sociological and theological merits of IMs will be made and alternatives will be suggested.

## *I. Introduction*

How can a new convert from Islam be integrated into the Christian Church? Amongst Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), those who were formerly very attached to Islam face many religious and cultural challenges. Missionaries often experience difficulties as they seek to help these people to adapt to their new faith and their new Christian community.

The difficulties take various forms. On the one hand, and especially in predominantly Muslim countries, converts face the rejection of their families. They may also be rejected by their communities and find themselves on the margins of society. On the other hand, the convert is so imbued with Islamic culture that, though having become a Christian, he will neither desire nor intend to abandon his cultural inheritance. Christianity has always been a universal faith that can be expressed in any culture, but today, unfortunately, it is often viewed as synonymous with Western civilization. Many believe that converting to Christianity means adopting a Western lifestyle. This only complicates the situation, especially since in Islam, religion and culture are so closely linked that it is hard to separate them.

This is no doubt the most challenging issue that many Christian missions and movements have grappled with. In recent years, the most controversial of these movements, functioning within the Islamic world, are the Insider Movements (IMs), also known as C5-communities.

In 1998 John Travis articulated what has become known as the study reference of various types of MBB communities.<sup>1</sup> His "C-Spectrum" ("C" stands for Christ-centred communities) goes from C1 to C6, from the situation of MBBs in communities totally removed from their culture of origin (C1) to MBBs keeping their conversion secret and having a total Muslim identity for their own safety (C6). However, today only C4 and C5 are subject to the debate known as "high spectrum"

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<sup>1</sup> John Travis, 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol 34, no. 4, (1998): 407-408.



contextualisation. The acronym C4 designates MBBs who include certain biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms in their way of living, such as avoiding eating pork or using Islamic terminology like the names of the prophets. These believers call themselves “followers of Isa Al-Masih, Jesus the Messiah.” Though highly contextualised, these believers are not seen as Muslims by the Muslim community. The C5 category concerns those who call themselves “Muslim followers of Jesus.” While they are convinced of the truth of the Bible, they continue to evolve within the Muslim community and to define themselves culturally and socially as Muslims. It is these people who are considered to be “Insiders.”

Ralph Winter calls The Insider Movements ‘A Third Reformation’.<sup>2</sup> Kevin Higgins, executive director of Global Teams<sup>3</sup>, one of the most active advocates of the IMs, agrees:

*I see Insider Movements as fueling (and being fueled by) a rediscovery of the role of the Incarnation, of a thoroughly biblical approach to culture and religion, of the role of the Holy Spirit in leading God’s people to “work out” the gospel in new ways, and an understanding of how God works in the world within and beyond His covenant people.*<sup>4</sup>

Timothy Tennent even reflects that ‘the Insider Movement may be an example of a sovereign initiative that has caught us by surprise.’<sup>5</sup> These are big claims. To establish whether they are true, it is vital to confront the issues biblically and honestly.

This paper addresses Insider Movements (IMs) within the world of Islam and presents a missiological evaluation of the principal IM paradigms. A definition of the movement will be given and discussed. We will also consider five major controversial areas that summarise the debate: 1) The legitimacy of IM members’ dual Islamic and Christian identity, 2) The openness of ‘Insiders’ towards the prophethood of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, 3) The Qur’an as Scripture, 4) The new translation of the Bible, and 5) The role of the local Church. The results of the preceding analyses will be synthesised, conclusions regarding the sociological and theological merits of IMs will be made and alternatives will be suggested.

## II. Defining the Insider Movement

One difficulty in the debate over this movement is that there is no definition that has been commonly agreed upon in detail by its advocates. Kevin Higgins acknowledges, “I know of no generally accepted definition for an *Insider Movement*.”<sup>6</sup> The difficulty arises from the diversity of both its advocates and its forms. However, Higgins offers the following as a working definition:

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<sup>2</sup> R Winter, ‘A Third Reformation? Movements of the Holy Spirit Beyond Christendom’, in H. Talman and J. Travis (eds.), *Understanding Insider Movements* (Kindle ed.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015), location 7764. Winter writes, ‘The first reformation was the shift from Jewish clothing to Greek and Latin clothing. A second happened when our faith went from Latin Christianity to German Christianity. This second reformation is the Reformation that everyone talks about, of course’ (Winter, ‘A Third Reformation? Movements of the Holy Spirit Beyond Christendom’, location 7764).

<sup>3</sup> A Christian organisation that plants churches amongst Muslims.

<sup>4</sup> K. Higgins, ‘The Key to Insider Movements: The Devoteds of Acts’, *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21:4 (Winter 2004): 156-157.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Tennent, ‘Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 High Spectrum Contextualisation’ *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 23:3 (2006): 102.

<sup>6</sup> Higgins, ‘The Key to Insider Movements: The Devoteds of Acts’, 156.

*Insider Movement: A growing number of families, individuals, clans, and/or friendship-webs becoming faithful disciples of Jesus within the culture of their people group, including their religious culture. This faithful discipleship will express itself in culturally appropriate communities of believers who will also continue to live within as much of their culture, including the religious life of the culture, as is biblically faithful.*<sup>7</sup>

According to Rebecca Lewis, a distinct feature of IMs is that 'believers retain their identity as members of their socio-religious community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.'<sup>8</sup> Harley Talman and John Travis argue that a distinction must be made concerning the function of religion in the West from other places in the world, since 'religious forms, symbols, and culture for much of the world are often fused so that religions function like cultures.'<sup>9</sup>

To be more specific, an "Insider" is someone who considers Jesus as "Saviour" and "Lord," yet may call himself a Muslim when speaking to Muslims. After all, the word "Islam" means *submission*, and a Muslim is one who submits. Since MBBs submit to God, they can call themselves Muslims. Therefore, an "Insider" may wish to continue to go to the Mosque, fast during Ramadan, go on pilgrimage, and even wish to believe and recite the "Shahada" (There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet). Some IM defenders have gone so far as to acknowledge Muhammad, the founder of Islam, as a prophet from God pointing to the truth and the Qur'an as a word from God, whose content does not contradict the biblical message. Therefore, our mission, they claim, must not be to extract MBBs out of Islam and into Christianity, but to have them follow Jesus while keeping their Muslim identity. IM advocates see their methodology as the best way to get the greatest number of Muslims moving in the direction of Christian faith.

Having looked at the most widely accepted definition of an Insider Movement, we will now turn our discussion to the five major controversial areas mentioned in the introduction, thereby addressing the claims upon which the entire IM paradigm rests.

# 1. Is it legitimate to maintain a dual Muslim and Christian identity?

Missiologists agree that MBBs will often carry into Christianity much baggage from their previous religion. There will always be a need for a transitional period wherein the new believer, while growing in his new faith, slowly leaves behind his old religion. However, many IM publications promote a strategy that not only allows, but even encourages new believers to remain within the traditions of their religious heritage.

IM advocates put forward various Bible passages in an attempt to find scriptural justification for the idea that embracing "gospel faith" does not require converting away from one's old religion, particularly if the individual fears persecution. One of the main examples used to claim that it is acceptable to lead a double life, is the story of Naaman the Syrian. The prophet Elisha granted Naaman's request for forgiveness for the times when he would have to bow down when accompanying his pagan elderly master in worship, when his master went to the temple of

<sup>7</sup> Higgins, 'The Key to Insider Movements: The Devoted of Acts', 156.

<sup>8</sup> Tim and Rebecca Lewis, *Planting Churches: Learning the Hard Way*, (Mission Frontiers, 2009), 16. [Online] Available at: <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/plantingchurches> (accessed: 28.7.2018).

<sup>9</sup> Talman and Travis, *Understanding Insider Movements* (Kindle ed.), location 679.

Rimmon. Elisha tells him to go in peace. According to Higgins, Naaman was therefore an Insider in the pagan temple.<sup>10</sup> However, critics have raised the point that there is no way to assess whether Naaman's continued participation in the temple of Rimmon was long or short term. Ayman Ibrahim also comments that, 'without disputing this in Naaman's one-of-a-kind case, it does not follow that what Elisha allowed in the case of a solitary individual may be applied in any sense to a group of believers turning to the true God, which is where the IM discussion resides'.<sup>11</sup>

According to Talman, Jameson, and Higgins, 'the New Testament never speaks of salvation as adopting a new religion or changing one's socio-religious affiliation'.<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Lewis writes that, 'the gospel reveals that a person can gain a new spiritual identity without leaving one's birth identity, and without taking on a new socioreligious label or going through the religion of either Judaism or Christianity'.<sup>13</sup> She argues that Jewish background Christians in the early Church continued to go to the temple and synagogues even though they also attended Christian churches. In light of this, she continues, we should allow new MBBs to continue practicing Islam outwardly just as they always have done, while inwardly recognising Jesus as Lord in their hearts.

Responding to the IM position, David Sills writes:

*Christianity does not flow out of Islam as it did out of Judaism, and here the comparison crumbles ... Jewish background believers would continue to embrace much of the old as they learned the new. Thus Jewish background believers were allowed to go to the Temple as well as the "church" not because they just needed time to adjust, but because they were undergoing a transition from the old to the new within God's sovereign plan and timeline. However, Muslims are not in this continuum and so the comparison does not apply.*<sup>14</sup>

The issue here is the understanding of what conversion is. Sills criticises the IM's perspective as 'putting a cross on top of their popular religiosity and traditional worldview'.<sup>15</sup> He explains that 'repentance and turning to Christ in salvation is not only turning from what we consider to be blatant and rebellious sin, but from all sin, which includes turning from everything we trusted in for salvation before being born again by grace through faith in Christ.' This idea of turning away from one's former beliefs is found throughout the New Testament (Acts 3:26, Acts 14:15, Acts 26:18, 1Thessalonians 1:9, James 5:20, 1Peter 2:25).

## 2. What about Muhammad?

If the prophethood of Muhammad is a central belief of Islam, common to all Muslims, then it must be adopted by the Insiders. Talman seems to understand this necessity in that he penned, *Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?* In order to somehow recognise Muhammad's divine mission,

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<sup>10</sup> K. Higgins, 'The Biblical Basis for Insider Movements', in A.S. Ibrahim and A. Greenham (eds.), *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 214.

<sup>11</sup> Ibrahim, *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 224.

<sup>12</sup> R. Jameson, K. Higgins, & H. Talman, 'Myths and Misunderstandings About Insider Movements,' in H. Talman and J. Travis (eds.), *Understanding Insider Movements*, (Kindle ed.; Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015), locations 1821–1825).

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, *Planting Churches: Learning the Hard Way*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> David Sills, 'A Response to Insider Movement Methodology', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 377–378.

<sup>15</sup> Sills, 'A Response to Insider Movement Methodology', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 377.

IMs suggest redefining his prophethood. Talman finds in the examples of Saul and Balaam a biblical justification of the prophethood of Muhammad.<sup>16</sup> He also suggests that, since Muhammad served as prophet 1400 years ago, we should accept him as the prophet of Islam at least historically. Brother Noah, one of the leaders of an Insider Movement gives his view of Muhammad as a prophet:

*How do we accept a person as a prophet? A prophet is one who calls people to God, who calls people to repentance, who calls his people to turn away from sin to God ... Muhammad was born in Arabia, where people used to worship 360 gods and goddesses ... Muhammad in his time called his people to the God of Abraham. He told them that these 360 gods are not the true God, that they have no power, and that we need to worship the true God, the God of our ancestors Abraham and Ishmael. He introduced Isa Al-Masih to his people. Muhammad told his people that Isa is the Messiah, He is the Word of God, He is the Spirit of God and He is a miracle and sign to the world ... So someone can say the shahada and at the same time can believe in Jesus as his Saviour and Lord.<sup>17</sup>*

Joshua Fletcher criticizes this openness to the prophethood of Mohammad by contrasting the function and form of the Shahada with the Christian confession, 'One God, and Jesus is Lord.'<sup>18</sup> He writes that 'leading people [MBBs] to recite the Shahada because Muhammad ostensibly had some limited and redefined prophetic role is to entirely misunderstand the function of the Shahada.'<sup>19</sup> He goes on to explain that while it is true that Muhammad brought people from idol worship, he did not lead them to the living God through the real Christ. Fletcher concludes that it is impossible to be a Christian and believe the Islamic creed (Shahada) since 'the form of the Islamic confession is not merely a random statement ascribing importance to Muhammad, but in fact functions polemically as an anti-gospel'.<sup>20</sup> What Fletcher means is that the Shahada deliberately denies the Lordship of Jesus in the life of the believer.

### 3. What is the role of the Qur'an in the life of new believers?

Accepting Muhammad as a prophet logically implies giving allegiance to his prophetic production, namely the Qur'an. IM proponents, such as Fouad Accad, understand this necessity. Accad, a Lebanese Christian, has had a huge impact on the global missionary movement. In his book, *Building Bridges*, he states, 'As I've studied the Qur'an for thirty years, I've found it overwhelmingly pro-Christ, pro-Christian, and pro-Bible'.<sup>21</sup> In the late seventies Accad published a booklet entitled *Seven Jewish-Christian-Muslim Principles* in which he listed verses from the Bible and the Qur'an side by side, to give the impression that the two books agree. By this he hoped to draw Muslims to the Bible.

<sup>16</sup> H. Talman, 'Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?', *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 31:4 (2014): 169.

<sup>17</sup> H. Talman, 'Muslim Followers of Jesus, Muhammad and the Qur'an', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 503-504

<sup>18</sup> Joshua Fletcher, 'Insider Movements: Sociologically and Theologically Incoherent', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 189.

<sup>19</sup> Fletcher, 'Insider Movements: Sociologically and Theologically Incoherent', 189.

<sup>20</sup> Fletcher, 'Insider Movements: Sociologically and Theologically Incoherent', 189.

<sup>21</sup> Fouad Accad, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 10.

In *Muslim Conversion to Christ*, Talman was asked to write a chapter explaining the Insiders' view of the Qur'an. His exposition relies heavily on Insiders' testimonies and opinions of the Qur'an and makes very little reference to the Bible. Talman considers that new believers should be given freedom to come to their own conclusion concerning the role of the Qur'an. 'From a Biblical perspective,' he concludes, it does not 'really matter to God if one honors Muhammad and the Qur'an or not, nor does it impact one's walk with God'.<sup>22</sup>

Amongst Christians today, there is an ongoing debate concerning the place of the Qur'an in evangelising Muslims. While some are happy to use the Qur'an for missiological purposes, many believe IM advocates have gone too far by recognising it, at least in part, as the Word of God. According to the IMs, not everything about Muhammad and the Qur'an must be rejected in order to believe and follow Jesus. The Church is therefore encouraged 'to ignore the obscure parts [in the Qur'an] and focus on the clear ones'.<sup>23</sup> Insiders say, 'the clear passages are the ones that do not conflict with the earlier scriptures but instead repeat what they say'.<sup>24</sup> Uncomfortable with the implication of Talman's methodology, Ayman Ibrahim replies, 'Is this a theologically sound approach? Does the Insiders' testimony prescribe a new way for the Christian faith? Do we have a specific set of doctrines, which is suitable for Insiders, and another set which applies to outsiders?'<sup>25</sup>

The following question is therefore raised: What about the "obscure" qur'anic verses that distort the biblical Jesus? Verses that depict Jesus as just a messenger of God like any other (Q. 5:75), and classify anyone who believes in the deity of Christ as a blasphemer (Q 5:72)? What about the verses that deny both the crucifixion and the atonement? Insider Kevin Higgins, in his attempt to preserve the integrity of the Qur'an, proposes a qur'anic exegesis based upon a new 'Jesus hermeneutic'.<sup>26</sup> He has developed a Christocentric interpretation of the Qur'an, suggesting that the "obscure" verses should be read differently to conform to Christian theology. So, for example, if the Qur'an criticises a biblical doctrine, an Insider can simply take it to refer to a Christian heresy. If a qur'anic verse denies the deity of Jesus, an Insider can simply take it to refer to the humanity of Jesus, and so on.

Ayman Ibrahim reacts strongly to this in these words: 'In reinterpreting these verses to fit into Christian dogma, one would redact the Qur'an, abuse Islamic thought and history, and violate Islamic exegesis ... Can evangelicals reinterpret qur'anic passages in isolation from the interpretations offered by medieval, modern, and contemporary Muslim commentators,' which have always affirmed that the Qur'an criticises mainstream Christianity, particularly concerning the death and the deity of Christ?<sup>27</sup> Jay Smith goes even further to say that to do this 'suggests arrogance, coupled with Western intellectual imperialism'.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Talman, 'Muslim Followers of Jesus, Muhammad and the Qur'an', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 141.

<sup>23</sup> Talman, 'Muslim Followers of Jesus, Muhammad and the Qur'an', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 129.

<sup>24</sup> Talman, 'Muslim Followers of Jesus, Muhammad and the Qur'an', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 129.

<sup>25</sup> Ibrahim, *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 142.

<sup>26</sup> K. Higgins, 'The Key to Insider Movements: The Devoteds of Acts', in *Understanding Insider Movements*, locations 5809-5810.

<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim, *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 142.

<sup>28</sup> J. Smith, *Assessment of Insider Movements* (2011), 9. [Online.] Available: [www.strateias.org/insider.pdf](http://www.strateias.org/insider.pdf) (accessed: 2.9.2018).

The positive view of the Qur'an held by IMs (which claim to be evangelical) certainly raises a serious question. If the Qur'an is an inspired book (even in part), can evangelical Christians still claim that the Bible is sufficient for teaching God's people?

4. Should the language of the Bible be adapted for those from non-Christian religions?

Although contextualisation and IM methodology have been applied in many areas of ministry, nothing is more controversial than its influence on Bible translation. Several attempts have been made to Islamise the Bible. The practice is called Muslim Idiom Translation (MIT). The idea is that Muslim readers of the Bible must not be offended but rather offered phrases they can accept, therefore terms such as "Father" and "Son of God" should not be used. A recent Muslim-friendly translation of the Bible was sponsored by Frontiers with help from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Mazhar Mallouhi, a Syrian convert who calls himself a 'Sufi Muslim follower of Christ,' spent many years with Muslim translators putting the New Testament into qur'anic-style Arabic. The resulting work, *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, was published in 2004 and revised a number of times until 2016. The main feature of Mallouhi's work is the removal of all references to God as Father and to Jesus being the Son. Alternative phrases such as "Beloved of God" or "Master of men" were used.

For supporters of MITs, accuracy no longer means faithfulness to the original text, but rather the impact of the translation on its reception. The consequence, according to Georges Housney, is that 'translating the Bible in this manner puts the recipient in a situation of becoming co-author and results in what is no longer technically a translation, but rather a paraphrase and/or adaptation of the original text'.<sup>29</sup> Mohammad Sanavi raises another serious issue:

*[F]or 1,400 years they [Muslims] have been told that the book [Bible] has been changed and cannot be trusted. However, when challenged to offer proof for such a statement, none can be given. For centuries, the church in Islamic countries has tried to help Muslim seekers to overcome this hurdle and realize that the Scripture we have today is the same as when it was originally written. If we change or remove the titles "Son of God" or "Father" from the text because they are barriers to Muslim readers, we create evidence that the Bible truly has been changed and is now corrupted.*<sup>30</sup>

5. How important is the Church?

For IM advocates, what matters is not the Church, nor Christianity, but only Jesus. Since social networks and relationships are central to Muslim culture, Church should reflect this. The word "community" is used instead of "Church". New believers should not be introduced into existing churches but encouraged to stay within their group. Eventually, these "pre-existing communities" will become the Church. IM missionaries Tim and Rebecca Lewis explain how they applied these cultural elements in their church planting effort:

<sup>29</sup> Georges Housney, 'Watching the Insider Movement Unfold' in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 405.

<sup>30</sup> Mohammad Sanavi, 'The Insider Movement and Iranian Muslims' in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 442.



*In each case, they were welcomed into a cohesive community, so the Gospel was shared with the whole group. As a result, people already committed to each other came to faith together. A church was born within a natural community, without creating a new group just for fellowship. It reminded us of something Ralph Winter has said, "The 'church' (i.e., committed community) is already there, they just don't know Jesus yet!"<sup>31</sup>*

While this provokes debate on the definition of the Church, some missiologists, however, have raised concern about the IM's ecclesiological paradigm - namely the transmission of Christianity from one generation to another. Encouraging new believers to retain their Muslim identity will not foster the growth of Christianity. According to Jay Smith, history tells us that in the early years of Islam, many Christian communities, in order to avoid paying tax (*jyza*), were allowed to live as "Insiders," (Christian followers of Islam), if they simply recited the Shahada.<sup>32</sup> Those Christian Insider communities eventually disappeared as their children were simply absorbed into Islam. Jay asks the legitimate question, 'What have the IM proponents put in place as their intergenerational strategy to keep this from happening with their new believers?'.<sup>33</sup>

While the majority of IM groups call for a permanent remaining as Insiders, others argue that these Insiders will eventually lay aside their Muslim identity and be mature Christians with healthy churches. Yet, as David Sills writes, 'it is legitimate to ask whether this could ever happen ... People with a poisoned worldview will not simply get better and better without help. They must be disciplined and folded into a community of believers'.<sup>34</sup>

Robin Hadaway reflects that untaught churches and pastors often drift quickly into heresy and may do more harm than good.<sup>35</sup> This is confirmed by Alan Tippett's research which showed that when people retain identity with their previous religion, they inevitably slide back into their old faith.<sup>36</sup> Other research is helpful here. In 1983 a C5 experiment was put into place by Phil Parshall and his team, who sought to plant churches that resembled mosques as a way of easing MBBs into Christianity. Twelve years later, they evaluated the fruit amongst these Insider converts. The results show that while '97% say Jesus is the only Savior [and] 100% pray to Jesus for forgiveness of sin [and] 97% say they are not saved because of Muhammad's prayers ... [Yet] 45% do not affirm God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; 45% feel peace or close to Allah when listening to the reading of the Qur'an; 31% go to the mosque more than once a day; 66% say the Qur'an is the greatest of the four books.' Some might see some encouragements here, others will notice pure syncretism.<sup>37</sup> Parshall expressed his reaction to these results in these words, 'I am apprehensive ... I am convinced that C5 missionaries are on very shaky theological and missiological ground'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lewis, *Planting Churches: Learning the Hard Way*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Assessment of Insider Movements*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Assessment of Insider Movements*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Sills, 'A Response to Insider Movement Methodology', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 378.

<sup>35</sup> Robin Hadaway, 'A Course Correction in Missions: Rethinking the Two-Percent Threshold', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 57:1 (2014): 28. [Online] Available at:

[https://swbts.edu/sites/default/files/images/content/docs/journal/SWJT\\_57\\_1.pdf](https://swbts.edu/sites/default/files/images/content/docs/journal/SWJT_57_1.pdf) (accessed 21.7.2018).

<sup>36</sup> Alan Tippett, *Slippery Paths in the Darkness: Papers on Syncretism: 1965-1988* (Pasadena William Carey Library, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> P. Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* (Waynesboro: Gabriel Publishing, 2003), 69-70.

<sup>38</sup> P. Parshall, 'Danger! New Directions in Contextualization', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34:4, (1998).



### III. *Where Do We Go from Here?*

Having summarised the debate surrounding the Insider Movement, which conclusions can be reached and are there alternative ways of approaching contextualisation?

#### 1. How far is too far?

Virtually all Christians see the need for contextualisation. 'If we do not contextualize, we are indeed changing the gospel. We are essentially saying that someone must leave their culture and adopt our own before they can come to Christ'.<sup>39</sup> Yet this raises questions such as, how far is too far? How much assimilation of cultural and religious expression is acceptable? How much false belief is okay? Paul's contextualisation practice described in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, the very passage used by IM advocates to justify their methodology, gives useful limits. Paul wrote that all he did was 'for the sake of the gospel.' Therefore, it can be stated that any form of contextualisation that would discredit Christ and his gospel is going too far.

#### 2. Deception

One can conclude that the IM paradigm raises a serious ethical issue – the problem of deception. Honesty is at stake here. When speaking to Muslims, the MBB knows what his hearers understand when he calls himself a Muslim, and that he is deceiving them by using the word. The IM encourages its followers to attend mosques and pray as normal Muslims do – except that in their hearts they are praying to Jesus. Muslims who discovered their secret would feel betrayed and deceived. They would also consider these Insiders to be corrupting their religion, since Muslims believe that non-Muslims are unclean and should not enter a Mosque. Worse, this could lead to condemnation from local Islamic authorities, imprisonment and even death – the very things the IM is trying to avoid.

Over the years, Christian apologists have levelled an accusation at Muslims concerning the practice of *Taqiyya*, or dissimulation – disguising or lying over one's beliefs in certain circumstances. Therefore, questions are raised: Is this what IMs are asking new converts to practice? How can this be reconciled with the example of Jesus Christ and with the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:2, 'We do not use deception'?

#### 3. Alternative

In evangelical mission to Muslims, there have been two extreme approaches, each of which has limitations. Historically, the most common approach could be called the "Outsider Movement." Converts from Islam are expected to *come out*, not only of their religious background, but also their cultural heritage. In the opposite approach, the subject of this work, the Insider Movement, converts from Islam are encouraged to *remain inside* their cultural and religious context. It can be reasoned that it is not healthy nor appropriate for a believer in Christ to live as a full Insider nor as

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[Online] Available at: <https://missionexus.org/danger-new-directions-in-contextualization> (accessed 7.7.2018).

<sup>39</sup> Sills, 'A Response to Insider Movement Methodology', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 379.

a full Outsider. A more balanced approach would be what Abu Jaz calls 'Cultural Insider, Theological Outsider (CITO).'

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There are certainly some people labelled as "Insiders" who identify with Islam *culturally*, yet do not accept or recite the Shahada. They openly embrace the Lordship of Christ. Clearly, these are not socio-religious Insiders as IM advocates claim, but Christians who identify with Islamic culture for pragmatic reasons. An example of behaving as a Cultural Insider would be the continued use of terminology of Arabic origin. Terms like "Allah", "Alhamdou-lillah" (praise be to Allah), and "Astarfirou-Allah" (may Allah have mercy on me) are not simply religious words to a Muslim but are closely linked to their local culture and language. They are used very naturally. Those who follow the "Outsider Movement" approach are not willing to use these terms in their mission amongst Muslims for fear that they might convey Islamic doctrines. For example, much unnecessary time is spent arguing that the title "Allah" is of pagan origin and therefore should be avoided. Asking a newly-converted MBB to immediately stop using the above terms can create unnecessary confusion, because they have always thought of the word Allah as a term describing the Creator. By all means, Christians should assess the existing culture in the light of the Word of God (Romans 12:1-2), but there is no need to dig for the linguistic roots of the different terms referred to above, as long as they help people to communicate clearly. Once people come to faith, they begin to assign biblical meaning to such words.

However, being a *Cultural Insider* is not enough. One must also be a *Theological Outsider*. A distinction must be made between cultural and religious heritage. Jaz asserts that MBBs must not neglect their spiritual connection, which affiliates them to the body of Christ.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, '[w]hatever culture one is born into, one should be a CI in order to preach the Good News, and thus restore people's relationship with their Creator through Jesus the Christ'.<sup>42</sup> The Christian's goal should always be to openly glorify God through the person and work of Jesus Christ who is the essence of the Gospel. Nothing should be deducted from, added to or mixed with this belief. Therefore, theological claims such as the prophethood of Muhammad and the divine origin of the Qur'an should be rejected. This is what it means to be a theological outsider.

#### IV. A Final Remark

The major aim of the IM is to eliminate the challenges faced by the MBB. The intention is no doubt good. Yet, Jesus made it clear that following him would not be easy (Mark 8:34–38). Rejection by the community and, sometimes, persecution from local authorities or family, are simply part of the challenge the new believer accepts. The early church expected it. Therefore, as Jay Smith reflects, 'One wonders how the Insiders can read the history of the early church from the book of Acts, or the history of the first 300 years of Christianity (to say nothing of the last 2000 years), and

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<sup>40</sup> Abu Jaz, 'The Cultural Insider, Theological Outsider (CITO)', *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 32:2 (2015), 62. [Online] Available at: [https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/32\\_2\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_32\\_2-Jaz.pdf](https://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/32_2_PDFs/IJFM_32_2-Jaz.pdf) (accessed: 29.8.2018).

<sup>41</sup> Abu Jaz 'Our Believing Community Is a Cultural Insider but Theological Outsider (CITO)', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 426.

<sup>42</sup> Jaz 'Our Believing Community Is a Cultural Insider but Theological Outsider (CITO)', in *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 426.

assume that extraction [of MBBs] is to be avoided!’<sup>43</sup> Muslims who become Christians will always pay a high price for their faith. The Gospel includes blessing and pain for Christ’s sake. Any attempt to change the Christian message in order to help new converts to live an easier life is a betrayal of the full Gospel of Christ. In the words of Samuel Zwemer, the great missionary to Muslims: ‘A passion for Moslem souls does not mean that we are to compromise or to reconcile at any price. *Faithful are the wounds of a friend.*’<sup>44</sup>

In Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus commands Christians to disciple and teach new converts, especially those still living in the community that has shaped their worldview. Christians are called to fulfil the Great Commission not simply by “teaching them to obey”, but by ‘teaching them to obey *everything* I have commanded you,’ says Jesus (emphasis added).

It has been shown that IM methodology is theologically dangerous and missiologically incorrect. It hinders the growth of biblical Christianity and the Church among Muslims. The ethics of such a paradigm are concerning. Mixing Christianity and Islam will not produce something better. The result is neither Christianity nor Islam. If it is different to biblical faith, it is not Christianity.

## About the author

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<sup>43</sup> Smith, *Assessment of Insider Movements*, 3-4.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel Zwemer (1948, p. 118)

# DO CHRISTIANS MEET FOR WORSHIP?

## A Review Essay: William Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship: All of Life for God's Glory*

*Dr Robert Strivens*

### *Abstract*

This review article considers recent evangelical reflections on the nature of worship. Many evangelicals are positing that as all of life is worship it is inappropriate to speak of Christians going to church to worship. Indeed, for many evangelicals, this is now the ruling paradigm: we meet for worship only in the sense that the whole of the believer's life is worship. If we think that we meet for worship, our language and our thinking about such meetings needs to undergo a radical transformation. This position has been argued in a recent and influential book on the subject, *Revolutionary Worship: All of Life for God's Glory*, by William Taylor, rector of St Helen's, Bishopsgate. In contrast to this view, this article argues for the historic understanding of the meeting of the local church as a meeting for the worship of God, at which the Lord's people may expect to know Christ's presence with them by his Spirit in a special manner.

### I. *Introduction*

Do Christians meet for worship? Historically, the church has believed that the purpose of her gatherings was for the worship of God. In recent years, this belief has been forcefully critiqued by some sections of reformed evangelicalism. It has been suggested that to say that we go to church for worship is like saying that we go to bed to breathe.<sup>1</sup> All of life is to be lived to the glory of God and when we think of 'worship' we should be thinking of every aspect of all that we do at any time, not merely what we do when we gather with other Christians to sing, pray and hear from the Bible. For many evangelicals, this is now the ruling paradigm: we meet for worship only in the sense that the whole of the believer's life is worship. If we think that we meet for worship, our language and our thinking about such meetings needs to undergo a radical transformation. This is the thesis of a recent book on the subject, *Revolutionary Worship: All of Life for God's Glory*,<sup>2</sup> written for a popular audience by William Taylor, rector of St Helen's, Bishopsgate.

### II. *Revolutionary Worship*

William Taylor has written a series of 'Revolutionary' books, of which *Revolutionary Worship* is the most recent; the previous titles are *Revolutionary Sex: How the Good News of Jesus Changes*

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<sup>1</sup> Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2002), 26.

<sup>2</sup> William Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship: All of Life for God's Glory* (Leyland: 10Publishing, 2021).

*Everything* (10Publishing, 2015) and *Revolutionary Work: What's the Point of the 9 to 5?* (10Publishing, 2016). The books are short and the writing is clear and simple, assisted by suitable illustrations and examples. In *Revolutionary Worship*, Taylor examines what the New Testament teaches on worship. He argues that what many Christians, including evangelicals, understand as worship does not represent the New Testament teaching on the subject: 'the biblical understanding of worship is ... revolutionary because often it contrasts markedly with what passes as a Christian practice even in our so-called "evangelical" or "reformed" circles. The gospel of the Lord Jesus radically challenges what is regarded as "worship".'<sup>3</sup> Taylor's thesis is that a radical change occurred in the nature of worship with the coming of Christ into the world. As a result of Jesus's death and resurrection, worship now encompasses all aspects of life. It is no longer something that is done by God's people only at particular times and places: "the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus has revolutionised our worship such that it involves the whole of our life."<sup>4</sup> Now that Christ has come, all of life is worship. What then are Christians doing when they meet for what many would still call 'worship'? The answer given in *Revolutionary Worship* is that we meet "to hear the truth of the gospel, to encourage one another in this truth, to thank God for it, and to ask for his help as we go out into the world to worship".<sup>5</sup>

The argument is substantiated from four passages of the New Testament: John 4:1-26; Romans 12:1-3; Hebrews 12:1-13:8 and 1 Peter 1:22-2:10. In John 4, Jesus showed the woman at the well that temple worship was coming to an end, to be replaced by worshippers who themselves have the presence of God all the time, by the Spirit. God's people now worship him wherever they are, by living for him and serving him all day long. They praise him in their daily lives by testifying to others of who he is – not merely by singing his praises in a meeting, but by speaking the truth about him in praise of him to others. Now, for the believer, "it's worship time all the time, and every place is worship space".<sup>6</sup> In his letter to the Romans, Paul teaches that believers are right with God solely through the finished work of Christ on the cross. Chapter 12 of that letter shows that worship is our response to what God has done for us. This involves every aspect of our lives, not only what we do when we meet with other believers on a Sunday. We gather on Sunday – or at other times – in order to learn from God's Word how to live for him all week long. We should therefore not refer to or think of our meetings as a time particularly of worship. We are to be engaged in worship every hour of every day of the week.

In chapter 12 of Hebrews, the writer argues that the disciple of Christ now has access directly into the heavenly presence of God himself, at all times and in all places. Special places and special times for access to God are redundant. The final verses of that chapter, which speak of God as a consuming fire to be worshipped in reverence and awe, leads into the practical instruction of chapter 13. It is obedience to that practical instruction that constitutes the reverential worship of this awesome God; it is not that "Christians meeting together must create an awesome experience of God".<sup>7</sup> In his first letter, Peter uses Old Testament temple worship language to speak, in the light of Christ's coming, of all that God's people do wherever they are. It is Christian believers who are

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 56, 124-25.

now the family, temple and nation of God. We do not need to do anything to become right with God, for we are right with him in Christ. So “Christians should never seek to create an experience in our so-called ‘worship meetings’ that suggests we somehow enter God’s presence through our worship”.<sup>8</sup> We are to offer up spiritual sacrifices, which Peter explains by way of the practical instruction for daily life that he gives in the sections of his letter that follow. We are to proclaim God’s praises publicly, which we do in our evangelism.

What then are Christians to do when they meet? *Revolutionary Worship* addresses this question from Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 5:18-20 and Colossians 3:16-17. These verses form part of Paul’s instruction about what it means to live lives filled by the Spirit of God. They concern, again, practical Christian living. A Spirit-filled life is one that is lived out day by day in the service and to the glory of God. The verses themselves speak of horizontal instruction and encouragement – of addressing one another with the great truths of God’s Word. There is, at the same time, a vertical aspect to our meetings, as we address our praise and prayers to God and listen to God speaking to us in his Word. This can be done at any time, but these particular verses relate primarily to what believers do when we meet. The Word of God must be central to all that is done in our meetings and must drive every aspect of it. Our singing is to be congregational, rather than the performance of a few. We are to emphasise fellowship and mutual teaching and encouragement.

Taylor summarises the main points made in his book in his concluding chapter:

*Above everything else, true Christian worship rightly understood, is a response to what Jesus has already done. God is never ‘approached’ in worship. Christians do not come any closer to God in worship than they already are. Believers do not need a worship leader other than Jesus. He presents his people to God and brings his people to God. God is not worshipped primarily in a church building; he dwells within his people by his Holy Spirit. Thus, wherever his people find themselves, they are the dwelling place of God. Perhaps if we are still using the language of worship to describe what we do in our meetings and buildings, we need to ask ourselves whether we have quite as big a view of what Jesus has accomplished as the New Testament authors do?*<sup>9</sup>

### III. Assessment

*Revolutionary Worship* follows a line of thinking about worship that was made popular with the publication in 1992 of David Peterson’s book, *Engaging with God*. In that volume, Peterson, principal of Oak Hill College in London from 1996 to 2007, gave concentrated attention to the way in which the New Testament uses worship language.<sup>10</sup> Some of the detail of his exegetical work is contained in his chapter in a book edited by D. A. Carson which came out in the following year, *Worship: Adoration and Action*,<sup>11</sup> but his interest in the subject can be traced back to two articles published in the previous decade: “Towards a New Testament Theology of Worship” and “Further

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<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 100-101.

<sup>10</sup> David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Leicester: Apollos, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> David Peterson, ‘Worship in the New Testament’, in D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Baker Book House, 1993), 51-91. See also Peterson, ‘The Worship of the New Community’, in I. Howard Marshall & David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 373-95.

Reflections on Worship in the New Testament”.<sup>12</sup> Previous work in this area includes that of Ernst Käsemann, who argued that the apostle Paul does away with all cultic spaces, times and activities, as well as all ideas of priesthood (other than the universal priesthood of believers), these being superseded by the everyday bodily obedience of the community of believers.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, I. Howard Marshall analysed worship language in the New Testament and concluded, “Although the whole activity of Christians can be described as the service of God and they are engaged throughout their lives in worshipping him, yet this vocabulary is not applied in any specific way to Christian meetings ... Christian meetings are not said to take place specifically in order to worship God and the language of worship is not used as a means of referring to them or describing them.”<sup>14</sup>

Peterson’s analysis showed that key worship terms used in the New Testament – προσκυνειν (*proskynein*), λατρευειν (*latreuein*), λειτουργειν (*leitourgein*) – have primarily to do with the concept of service. Peterson concluded that New Testament worship is essentially the offering of the whole of a believer’s life to God in his service, on the basis of the atoning work accomplished in the self-sacrifice of Christ. This is why worship language is used in the New Testament for Paul’s preaching ministry to Gentiles (Romans 15:16), financial offerings (Romans 15:27), material gifts (Philippians 2:25; 4:18) and Christian service more generally (Philippians 2:17; 3:3) and in our ongoing reconciled relationship with God based on faith (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-25), in grateful obedience (Hebrews 9:14; 12:28; 13:15-16), on the basis of the kingdom that we have by grace already received (Hebrews 12:28-29).

This work and the ideas that it supported were taken up by Vaughan Roberts, rector of St Ebbe’s in Oxford, in a book published twenty years ago, *True Worship*.<sup>15</sup> Roberts argued strongly against the idea that worship was something that Christians primarily do in a church building at certain specified times: “the New Testament does not teach that we meet together to worship God”. Rather, he argued, we meet primarily for mutual encouragement and edification – our meetings are primarily directed at each other, not God-ward. It is true that ‘elements’ of our meetings are to be directed to God, essentially praise and prayer, but “this is not the primary reason why we meet together.”<sup>16</sup> Although he has not adopted all Roberts’s arguments, it is this line of thinking that William Taylor took up in a sermon series preached in 2018 at St Helen’s, Bishopsgate<sup>17</sup> and, most recently, in *Revolutionary Worship*.

There is much to appreciate in Taylor’s book. It is too easy to forget that every aspect of our lives is to be lived for God’s glory and that we are to worship the Lord in all that we do every day, not only when we gather for Christian meetings. The book brings home that message very clearly and forcefully. It is similarly clear on the essential matter of the finished nature of the saving work of Christ in his death and resurrection. The Christian believer is already right with God and no experience in a meeting of Christians is needed or is able to make him or her more justified in God’s

<sup>12</sup> David Peterson, ‘Towards a New Testament Theology of Worship’, *The Reformed Theological Review* 43 (1984): 65-73; Peterson, ‘Further Reflections on Worship in the New Testament’, *The Reformed Theological Review* 44 (1985): 34-41.

<sup>13</sup> Ernst Käsemann, ‘Worship and Everyday Life: A Note on Romans 12’, trans. W. J. Montague, in Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969), 188-95.

<sup>14</sup> I. Howard Marshall, ‘How Far Did the Early Christians Worship God?’, *Churchman* 99 (1985): 216-29, 220.

<sup>15</sup> Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Roberts, *True Worship*, 42-46, 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/article/1819/> [accessed 27 June 2022].



sight. In our meetings, the Word of God is to be central and all that we do when we meet is to be focused on and driven by that Word. We do not meet in order simply to experience special feelings – a ‘God hit’ – but to hear God speak through his Word and respond to him in praise and prayer. On all these vital matters, Taylor is clear and helpful.

Taylor – and Roberts before him – appear to have two main groups in their sights as they write. They are concerned, firstly, for Christians – perhaps nominal believers – who think that ‘worship’ extends only to what is done in church for an hour or so on a Sunday and who may regard the rest of their lives as theirs to live precisely as they please. This group has little concept that all of life is to be lived in the service of God, dedicated to Christ in every way. As ministers in the established church in England, Taylor and Roberts naturally believe that they need to address this question head on. What they have to say to on this issue is helpful and necessary.

The second group whom they seek to address are those evangelicals who believe that worship primarily relates to the musical element of Christian meetings. They engage in that part of their meetings with the hope of a great experience; various techniques – sound, lighting and other effects – may be used to seek to create this. Taylor, like Roberts before him, also addresses this group well, seeking to help them to see that worship is far greater and more extensive a concept than this. Not only is it to apply to the whole of our lives, but even within the Christian meeting the focus is to be not so much on the music as on the Word of God. Taylor’s section on how, in the church that he leads, they seek to ensure that God’s Word directs and dominates every aspect of their meetings is a most useful guide from which all who have responsibility for planning and leading meetings would benefit.<sup>18</sup>

There are, however, three themes that run through Taylor’s book which call for closer examination. Firstly, Taylor argues that, because all of life is to be lived in the worship of God, there is no special sense in which Christian meetings may be called ‘worship’. If believers use worship language to refer to what they do when they meet, they need to be very clear that such language is legitimate only because all that the believer does anywhere and at any time is worship. We do not meet with other believers ‘to worship’, because we are to be doing that all the time. Connected with this, secondly, is the question of the nature of what we do when we meet: is it primarily vertical, as the historic understanding of Christian meetings would hold, or is it horizontal? Roberts in *True Worship* had argued that it is primarily horizontal, though there are vertical elements to our meetings. The view that Taylor puts forward is that it is both – horizontal and vertical – without, it seems, prioritising one over the other. Then thirdly, Christians are not to think that, when they meet with other Christians, they are in any sense approaching God or coming nearer to him. God is present with the believer, by his Spirit, at all times and in all places, and the believer is already right with God through faith in Christ, so it is not possible to come closer to God. There is no special presence of God in the meetings of his people, over and above that which every believer enjoys everywhere all the time.

Taylor’s book, like Roberts’s, is written at the popular level and, though both books are rooted in biblical exposition, they understandably do not engage in depth with all the exegetical issues that their arguments raise. Yet they are seeking to persuade Christians to make a radical change in the language that they use about their regular meetings. This change is by no means merely

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 90-95.

semantic. It is to reflect an altered understanding about the very nature of those meetings. We are not to think that those meetings are in any sense worship, other than in the sense that all of life is worship. Our meetings are not primarily vertical, though they have that element to them. And we are not to imagine that we in any sense experience the presence of God in those meetings in any way different from the manner in which, as Christian believers, God is always present with us by his Holy Spirit. These are indeed radical claims. They represent a very marked change in the understanding that Christians have had about their meetings over the centuries and, if taken up, have a significant effect on how those meetings are viewed and experienced by Christians today. It is therefore vital that they are shown to have a solid biblical and exegetical foundation, if they are seriously to be taken on by God's people in their understanding of what they do when they meet.

#### IV. *Do We Meet for Worship?*

Taylor argues in *Revolutionary Worship* that Christians must reform their use of worship language, as “all the worship words of the New Testament” are “really used of everyday life”.<sup>19</sup> We need to bring our language into line, says Taylor, with that usage.<sup>20</sup> If we speak of Christian meetings as worship, we should also impress on ourselves and one another that we continue to worship when we leave our meetings and go out to live the rest of our lives: ‘as we walk out of the church’s door, we are going out to worship God’.<sup>21</sup> This is a powerful argument, but the radical demand that it makes upon our use of language and our understanding of what is happening at Christian meetings requires that it be subjected to careful examination.

Taylor examines in his book some New Testament passages that might appear to use worship language to refer primarily to what is done in Christian meetings. In John chapter 4, Jesus’s conversation with the Samaritan woman makes use several times of the verb προσκυνειν (*proskynein*), to bow down, which English translations generally render as ‘worship’. Taylor argues that the word, in the context of Jesus’s discourse there, must be understood to refer to what we do in all of life. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul describes what could happen when an outsider comes in to a Christian meeting – he is convicted by what is going on and “falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (v. 25). In a long end note, Taylor argues that Paul is referring here to the man’s conversion, “as he recognises the rule of Christ and submits his life to Jesus as King”.<sup>22</sup> The “worship word”, argues Taylor, “has nothing to do with the meeting itself”. In Hebrews chapter 12, the writer describes the heavenly gathering of perfected saints and the awesome presence of the God whom we serve (v. 28), using the worship word λατρευω (*latreuō*). Taylor explains that the kind of worship that is meant is expounded in the verses that follow in chapter 13, which describes the everyday practical work in which Christians are to be engaged. The “awesome worship” of chapter 12 consists in the kind of activity described in chapter 13.

In his exposition of each of these three passages, Taylor closely follows the exegesis of David Peterson in *Engaging with God*.<sup>23</sup> It is notable, however, that Peterson has concluded in his work

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<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 22-24.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 124.

<sup>23</sup> Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 97-100, 195-96, 241-46.

that it is nevertheless still legitimate to use worship language to refer to what Christians do when they meet. His preferred phrase is “congregational worship”. Congregational worship, says Peterson, is “a particular expression of the total life-response that is the worship of the new covenant”.<sup>24</sup> Commenting on the use of the worship word λειτουργω (*leitourgo*) in Acts 13:2-3, Peterson affirms, “If the service of God involved a certain lifestyle and ministry in everyday contexts, it also had a definite expression when Christians gathered together.”<sup>25</sup> Our worship “finds particular expression when Christians gather to minister to one another in word or deed, to pray, and to sound forth God’s praises in teaching or singing,” though “it is not to be restricted to these activities”.<sup>26</sup> Using the words of C. E. B. Cranfield, he writes that the “church meeting” is “the focus-point of that whole wider worship which is the continually repeated self-surrender of the Christian in obedience of life”.<sup>27</sup> In a later book, *Encountering God Together*, written for a more popular audience, Peterson goes so far as to say, “Authentic worship embraces the whole of life, but this does not alter the fact that there is a special realization or expression of worship when we gather together as Christ’s people.”<sup>28</sup> Peterson is at pains to point out that, when Christians meet, they do also worship and that there is a particular sense in which such meetings are truly and importantly worship – it is not merely that Christian meetings are worship because all of life is worship: there is an especial sense in which those meetings may rightly be referred to as ‘worship’.

The more nuanced approach of David Peterson, whose detailed exegetical work lies at the root of Taylor’s more popular work, seems preferable to the more black-and-white approach of *Revolutionary Worship* (and of Roberts’s *True Worship*). Peterson’s way of understanding Christian worship is shared by other scholars. D. A. Carson has questioned whether the view that Christians do not really gather for worship is not a ‘new reductionism’.<sup>29</sup> Herman Ridderbos, in his account of Paul’s theology, considered that, while all of life is worship for the Christian, the gathering of believers has a distinctive quality, in setting forth sharply the difference between the believer and the world: ‘in these meetings the peculiar character of the church in the world is disclosed in an exemplary way, just as the indwelling of Christ in his church becomes manifest through the proclamation of the gospel, the observance of the Lord’s Supper, the promise given, and the benediction pronounced in his name’.<sup>30</sup> Carson, again, wants to preserve the distinctiveness of the Christian meeting by using the term ‘corporate worship’ to describe it.<sup>31</sup> These important qualifications and nuances in the New Testament use of worship language are notable by their absence in *Revolutionary Worship*.

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<sup>24</sup> Peterson, ‘Worship in the New Testament’, 83.

<sup>25</sup> Peterson, ‘Worship of the New Community’, 388.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson, ‘Worship of the New Community’, 395.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Worship in the New Testament’, quoting C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* 2:602; Peterson lodges an objection, it should be noted, to Cranfield’s use of the term ‘a Christian cultic worship’.

<sup>28</sup> David G. Peterson, *Encountering God Together: Biblical Patterns for Ministry and Worship* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 37.

<sup>29</sup> D. A. Carson, ‘“Worship the Lord Your God”: The Perennial Challenge’, in Carson, ed., *Worship: Adoration and Action*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. R. de Witt (London: SPCK, 1977), 481.

<sup>31</sup> D. A. Carson, ‘Worship Under the Word’, in Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 49.

## V. *Horizontal Or Vertical?*

This debate is not purely semantic. The language of worship concerns how we engage with God and he with us. In his chapter on corporate worship, Taylor argues that our meetings have both a horizontal and a vertical aspect. He does not prioritise one over the other, though he says rather more about the horizontal than about the vertical aspects (probably because of his desire to correct a perceived imbalance in how Christians understand what they are doing when they meet). There is a difficulty here, however. Worship language, by definition, involves the idea of submission to a greater one. It comprises the paying of homage or adoration to the one to whom the worship is offered – in this case, God himself. David Peterson addresses this point in *Encountering God Together*. Worship language, he says, indicates homage, respect, service – whole-hearted, directed to God and particularly, under the new covenant, to Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup>

It is certainly true, as Taylor strongly maintains, that we meet for mutual edification. This edification must be seen, however, as an integral part of an event of much larger significance: that we are meeting with the living God, with Christ the head of the Church, in a manner that does not occur in other contexts. When the church meets, she is gathering together to Christ and, above and beyond any other purpose or benefit of its meeting, she is seeking to come corporately, as the body of Christ, to God. Thus it is by together coming to God in Christ by his Spirit and submitting to him and expressing to him our allegiance, homage and adoration that we are able to edify one another and the purpose of that mutual edification is that we might better, individually and together, serve and worship our King.

If then there is a particular sense in which Christians gather for the worship of God and that worship involves rendering homage and devotion to him, it is clear that the primary focus of our gatherings is vertical – we come together, first of all, to meet with God. So Peterson affirms, “Every Christ-centred gathering is an expression of our union with him and with each other before God’s heavenly throne. The *vertical* dimension (God’s engaging with us) is primary ... So we meet with God in the presence of one another and meet with one another in the presence of God.”<sup>33</sup> It is not, as all agree, that we bring anything to God that he does not already have. Rather, we are expressing our submission to and dependence upon him. We are saying that, truly, “He is Lord”. And so we come to offer to him, together, our combined praise, to seek him together, as his people, in our confession of sin, thanksgiving and prayers and, centrally though not exclusively, we come to hear together what he has to say to us as our Lord and King and Great Shepherd, in his Word, as he rules and governs us his people. It is this emphasis on the primacy of the vertical nature of Christian meetings that is missing in *Revolutionary Worship*.

## VI. *Do We Come into God’s Presence When We Meet?*

Taylor rightly argues that, after Christ’s death and resurrection, the Spirit of God indwells every believer. The temple is no longer the place where God particularly makes himself known to and present with his people. Every believer is now that place. Here is another reason why every part of

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<sup>32</sup> Peterson, *Encountering God Together*, 28-34.

<sup>33</sup> Peterson, *Encountering God Together*, 19.

our lives, at every moment, must be lived to God's glory. The corollary of this, according to Taylor, is that we are not to suppose that, when we meet, God is present with us in any way different from the manner in which he is present with us at other times. We should not give the impression in our meetings that we "somehow enter into God's presence through worship".<sup>34</sup> "Christians do not come any closer to God in worship than they already are."<sup>35</sup> The question, "Am I equally close to God when I meet with one other person in Starbucks to look at the word of God as I am when we gather together as a church on Sunday" clearly expects the answer "Yes".<sup>36</sup>

The distaste for the idea that Christians approach, or come closer in some sense, to God when the local church meets for worship is based on the vital truth that the believer is fully justified at all times in God's sight by faith in Christ and so nothing can be done, in Christian meetings or otherwise, to improve his or her standing before God. This, coupled with the fact that the believer is always indwelt by the Holy Spirit and in that sense enjoys the presence of God continually, means, in Taylor's view, that we should not think or speak of any special presence of God in Christian meetings.

It may prove helpful, in examining this issue, to look more closely at how the New Testament speaks of God's presence with his people and, particularly, at its use of temple language. As Taylor shows from Peter's first letter, it is in the New Testament the church that is referred to as God's temple, since the death and resurrection of Christ. Christian believers are "living stones", a "spiritual house", a "holy priesthood" who "offer spiritual sacrifices", with Christ as the cornerstone (1 Peter. 2:5-6). In the same way, Paul in his letter to the Ephesians uses temple vocabulary in his discussion of the church: words such as "built", "foundation", "cornerstone", "holy temple" and "dwelling place" (Ephesians. 2:20-22). Temple language can be used of the individual believer (Romans. 8:9, 11; 1 Corinthians. 6:19), but its use in both Paul's and Peter's writings in this regard is primarily corporate (see also 1 Corinthians. 3:9-17), as the New Testament language of the church as the "body of Christ" would lead one to expect (1 Corinthians. 12:27). Whereas during his earthly ministry Christ in his own body was the temple of God, now it is the church corporately which, as the body of Christ on earth, constitutes the place of God's dwelling. So Peter's reference to believers as "like living stones" is not to them individually but as those who are "being built up as a spiritual house": it is particularly the stones together which make the temple of God, the church gathered (1 Peter. 2:5).

So now, the temple, God's dwelling-place, is his people, those who are in Christ, understood primarily in a corporate sense. The body of Christ continues, in other words, to be the temple of the living God on earth, but that body consists and is expressed and seen by the world in those who are in Christ, the church, of which each local church is an expression. How then is that presence expressed and experienced by God's people in this present age? The obvious answer is: when they meet together, when they express in their gathering something of their corporate being as the body of Christ and the temple of the living God.

Thus it would seem to make complete biblical sense to speak of a particular presence of God when his people meet, especially as the local church. David Peterson in *Engaging with God* writes,

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<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 100

<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *Revolutionary Worship*, 51-52.

“several texts suggest that God presences himself in a distinctive way in the Christian meeting through his word and the operation of his Spirit”.<sup>37</sup> Again:

*The people of God continue to be the Spirit-filled community when they disperse and go about their daily affairs, but their identity as “the temple of the Lord” finds particular expression when they gather together in Jesus’ name, to experience his presence and power in their midst.*<sup>38</sup>

This presence is made known especially by the ministry of the Holy Spirit: “The ascended Lord ... inhabits our congregations by his Spirit (1 Corinthians. 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians. 6:16-18)”.<sup>39</sup> So, for Peterson, there is a particular sense in which God is present by his Spirit in the meetings of the church. This is the third area in which *Revolutionary Worship*, by contrast, lacks significant nuance.

## VII. Conclusions

*Revolutionary Worship* effectively counters two views of worship that are prevalent among different groups today – firstly, that worship is confined to what Christians do when they meet on Sundays, while the rest of life is one’s own to live as one pleases, and secondly, that worship is principally the musical part of the meeting in which those who participate hope to have an exciting experience of God. In response, Taylor has provided a clear, well-argued and well-illustrated explanation of the biblical teaching that the whole of life is to be lived for Christ’s glory – often referred to in the New Testament using worship language – and that the focus of Christian meetings and that which is to drive and underpin every aspect of them is not so much the music as the Word of God. These aspects of *Revolutionary Worship* are well executed and valuable.

We have seen, however, that in three respects William Taylor’s book lack important nuance. He – like Roberts in *True Worship* – wants to push the idea that all of life is worship to an extreme, such that we should not really be using worship language at all in relation to Christian meetings. Nor should we view those meetings as primarily a time when we engage vertically with God, nor should we expect in some sense to experience a particular presence of God at such times. In these respects, Taylor goes further than the more academic and detailed exegetical work of David Peterson on the subject, on which *Revolutionary Worship* otherwise relies heavily. As a result, Taylor’s book denies and rejects the unique sense in which the local church meets with her head, the Lord Jesus Christ, to worship God in his presence by his Spirit.

This is a serious loss. While the corrective to false views of Christian worship that Taylor provides in his book is welcome, his views risk pushing the church into a different – and dangerous – extreme. Denials that the church gathered is not really meeting for worship, in any meaningful sense different from our everyday service to Christ, is likely to diminish significantly the importance of such meetings in the minds of believers. If Christians are taught that they worship God just as much when going about their daily business as they do when they gather with the Lord’s people, will this not reduce the importance of attending church meetings in their thinking? There is likely also to be a significant change in the ethos of those meetings, if the belief that God is especially present there is rejected. Although there should be no place for an artificial creation of

<sup>37</sup> Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 287; on pp. 196-98, he cites in this regard 1 Cor. 14:24-25; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 12:4-13.

<sup>38</sup> Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 202.

<sup>39</sup> Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 37.

a heightened sense of excitement in our meetings, if it is in fact the case that the Lord Jesus Christ especially makes himself present there to minister to us through his Word and Spirit, there should be a correspondingly heightened sense of the significance of what we are doing when we meet. This will, surely, mean that we meet with a true sense of awe and reverence, as we contemplate the extraordinary nature of what we are doing in meeting corporately with the living God. The historic understanding of the meeting of the local church as a meeting for the worship of God, at which the Lord's people may expect to know Christ's presence with them by his Spirit in a special manner, is a vital biblical truth, the loss of which would constitute a severe blow to the spiritual health of Christ's church.

## About the author

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# JOHN DAVIDSON AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF 1596

*John W Keddie*

## *Abstract*

In this article we consider one of the most remarkable post-Reformation revivals in Scottish Church history. It concerns what happened at the General Assembly of the Scottish Reformed Church in 1596. It is little known by Christians today, even in Scotland. Yet one contemporary historian, David Calderwood (1575-1650), was to write that “This year [1596] is a remarkable year in the history of the Kirk of Scotland.”<sup>1</sup> We do need to bear in mind that the Word of God is the same, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and forever, that sin is the same, essentially, in every generation, and the overwhelming need for sinners to be saved is the same in the twenty-first century as it was in the sixteenth. It is a modern arrogance that because we are in such a supposedly advanced society, we have somehow left such things as religion behind. We are in a secular world which holds out no hope for eternity, and has no recognition of answerability to God, or serious thought of judgement to come. We should therefore be moved by the experience of the Church even as far back as 1596 and, after all, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is undiminished in His power to quicken those who by nature are dead in trespasses and sins. We are always invited to believe that what He did then, He can do again in His sovereign grace. Besides this, here is a vital tenet for the Church to maintain: Christ, who has all authority in heaven and earth, is building His church so that the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). In this reconnoitre in Scottish Church history, we can therefore learn many things of timeless value.

## *I. The Post-Reformation Struggles in The Scottish Reformed Church*

This is background to our visit to the General Assembly of 1596, thirty-six years after the first Assembly of the Reformed Church in Scotland. A right understanding of the Reformation of the sixteenth century recognises it as a work of the Holy Spirit. Yet the twenty years following the Reformation (1560) were turbulent years for the emerging Scottish Reformed Church. Certainly, the *Scots Confession* and the *First Book of Discipline* had been adopted by the Kirk. The Parliament had ratified the *Scots Confession* and had legislated in August 1560 that the Pope would have no jurisdiction in the kingdom. The Parliament of 1567 recognised the Reformed Church, though the Bishops retained their seats in Parliament and continued to draw their revenues, most of which, however, lined the purses of one or other of the nobility.

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<sup>1</sup> David Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, Volume V, Edinburgh, 1845, p. 387. The language of these quotations has been modernised in these sources.

In 1572 John Knox passed to his eternal rest. With his passing the Church lost a powerful leader. The Lord, however, had his man to take up the reins. Andrew Melville (1545-1622) returned from the continent in 1574 and the tide began to turn for the Reformed Church in Scotland. 1578 saw the introduction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Book of Discipline*, largely his doing. This strongly advocated a clear-cut distinction between civil and ecclesiastical government. It set forth strongly the principles of the divine right of Presbytery, over against Episcopacy (called in those days, 'Prelacy'). This *Book* was adopted at the General Assembly of 1581. But as long as James VI was king<sup>2</sup>, after he assumed the kingly powers in 1581, there would be an ebbing and flowing of forces which favoured Presbytery and forces which sought to displace it by Episcopacy and the attendant authority of the King and the Bishops, over whom he had a considerable degree of influence.

In 1592 things seemed finally to be settled with the passing of the so called 'Golden Act'<sup>3</sup> which came to be considered the *magna carta* of the Reformed Church in Scotland. It seemed decisively to settle once and for all the government and jurisdiction of the Church in the nation. It would be Presbyterian, governed under the Assembly through Synods, Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions. But things would not be so settled as long as James was on the throne, both before and after the Union of Crowns in 1603. Meanwhile those who had experienced the days of Reformation life had passed from the scene and the Church and country were afflicted by spiritual doldrums. There was, however, a bright light in the general darkness of the late sixteenth century church north of the border. It related to an 'ordinary' minister and an extraordinary General Assembly of the Kirk in Edinburgh in May 1596.

## II. *John Davidson And the General Assembly Of 1596*

A generation had passed since the Reformation. But it was only 36 years on from the stirring events of 1560 when a Reformed Church was established in the nation. It was a time of spiritual awakening. With the passage of time, however, there had been a growing carelessness in the church and indifference among the people. Standards had slipped. There was a feeling among some of growing apostasy from the Reformed Faith and life. The Reformation had brought life and a new enthusiasm for the great gospel truths rediscovered. But Church life had largely grown cold and was in urgent need of a revival by the Holy Spirit from above. Of course, in the interim there had been struggles not only from *outside* forces antagonistic to Reformed doctrine and Presbyterian church government, but also from *within* – not least ministers and elders in the Kirk growing cold or becoming formal and lifeless. This often repeats itself in the history of the Church. But there were some who were exercised about the situation. One such minister in Scotland was John Davidson.

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<sup>2</sup> James (19 June 1566 – 27 March 1625) was King of Scots from 1567 to 1625, and King of England and Ireland as James I from 1603 to 1625. He became King of Scots as James VI on 24 July 1567, when he was just thirteen months old, succeeding his mother Mary, Queen of Scots. Regents governed during his minority, which ended officially in 1578, though he did not gain full control of his government until 1581. On 24 March 1603, as James I, he succeeded the last Tudor monarch of England and Ireland, Elizabeth I, who died without issue. He then ruled the united kingdom of England, Scotland, and Ireland for 22 years, often using the title King of Great Britain, until his death at the age of 58.

<sup>3</sup> This was the so-called 'Golden Act': *Act for abolisheing of the actis contrair the trew religion*. See: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/aosp/1592/8>. (Accessed 23 January 2018).

John had been born in Dunfermline in Fife in 1549. So, he had memories of these exciting times when the Lord had visited the land with Reformation. He had been converted as a young boy. After graduating from St Andrews University in 1570, he had the wonderful experience of enjoying the ministry and fellowship there of John Knox in his declining years, physically speaking (the great Reformer passed away in 1572). We are told that “From July 1571 to August 1572 the venerable Reformer preached every Sunday and taught the prophecies of Daniel, ‘always applying his text according to the time and state of the people.’”<sup>4</sup> Knox, and other Reformers too, had made a deep impression on young John Davidson. However, the impression he made on others meant his exile more than once in England and the continent between 1574 and 1589. Entering the ministry of the Church of Scotland, Davidson ministered in several congregations in Edinburgh before being settled in Prestonpans (on the southern coast of the Firth of Forth, 11 miles east of Edinburgh). It is with this place and parish that Davidson’s name is invariably associated. He was there from 1595 until his passing in 1604.

It is clear that John Davidson was one of these men who would not go with the flow or remain silent on what he perceived to be corruptions in church and state, whatever discomfort it meant for himself through ill-will towards him. He felt so exercised about decline in spiritual religious life that he was not slow to speak out in the courts of the Church. His supreme conviction was that a spiritual awakening was needed in the Kirk. After all, the principal concern in life is surely to have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ! Is this not a great need of the present day? As for Davidson, he sought the guidance of his own Presbytery of Haddington about it.

### III. *The Overture Presented*

The Presbytery decided that a proposal (overture) be made to the annual General Assembly<sup>5</sup>, when ministers and elders gathered from all over the Church, that the gross sins of Church and State should be inquired into and addressed. Why? Because of the spiritual peril facing the nation! But what could be proposed? Just this: “Universal Repentance and earnest turning to God; and of order-taking for resisting the enemies and maintenance of the liberty of religion and country.”<sup>6</sup> The Presbytery was convicted that there was little good in discussing means of resisting the country’s enemies (specifically Spain) without first giving attention to the relations of the people to the King of kings and Lord of lords (‘order taking’, or ‘prioritising’ in that sense). The priority is for people to be submissive to God! All else is really unimportant by comparison. The proposal (overture) to the forthcoming Assembly (1596) dealt, not with the “structural sins of society” or purported political or economic vices so beloved of the modern church, but with three main things:

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<sup>4</sup> R Moffat Gillon, *John Davidson of Prestonpans*, London, 1936, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Presbytery* comprises all the ministers from a designated geographical area together with a ruling elder representing each congregation within that area. This collective body of men has responsibility of oversight of such congregations, though congregations in a Presbyterian system have a measure of independence. *Synods* comprise all the members of every Presbytery within a wider area. *General Assembly* is the highest court in a Presbyterian Church. It comprised a certain number (often one-third) of all ministers throughout the whole country with one elder for each minister appointed by Presbyteries.

<sup>6</sup> Gillon, op. cit., p. 148. The language of quotations has been slightly modernized from the contemporary sources.

- 1) "The gross sins of all estates which procure this present wrath of God be agreed upon by name, severally, and acknowledged by the Assembly, for the more easy provocation of the whole body of this realm to earnest repentance, and speedy turning away from sins foresaid."<sup>7</sup>
- 2) "The Assembly agrees upon the true and right taking up the sins of our princes and magistrates, superior and inferior, and on the sound means to deal with them dutifully and faithfully, without all flattery, for their true amendment."<sup>8</sup>
- 3) "That the most notorious sins of the whole body of the people, in burgh and land, be given in and acknowledged, and order taken for the speedy amendment thereof."<sup>9</sup>

In this spiritual exercise of self-examination, no one was spared, though there was a concern to focus on ministers and their sin and faults: "to begin at ourselves of the ministry."

*We acknowledge our public transgressions, in our persons and office particularly, whereof the catalogue is in readiness to be seen, according to the admonition of the Lord by his prophet, saying, "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people O Lord," etc., lest it be found, according to the saying of the apostle, that we that teach others teach not ourselves and so be found reprobates (Joel 2:17; Romans 2:21)!<sup>10</sup>*

The overture does proceed to address the sins of the princes, magistrates, nobility and people in a way that did not flatter nor deceive. The purpose? "For their true amendment" and for the "provocation of the whole body of the realm to earnest repentance."<sup>11</sup>

#### IV. *The Reaction in The General Assembly*

What would the ministers and elders make of this when they gathered for the General Assembly in the High Kirk of St Giles on 24 March 1596? There were some good and godly men in the Assembly. Andrew Melville and his nephew, James (1556-1614), were there, as were Robert Bruce (1554-1631), Robert Rollock (1555-1599) and Patrick Simson (1556-1618). These were all good and godly ministers and committed Presbyterians. There were around 400 ministers and elders in all. A challenge arose at the outset. What place was going to be given to the overture presented by John Davidson on behalf of the Presbytery of Haddington? At that point Britain (not yet united of course, either by crown [1603] or Parliament [1707]) was under threat from Spain and the Scottish state authorities were looking for the approval of the Church to the levying of a tax to enable co-operation with England in order to resist the threat of Spain. The danger was reckoned, after all, to be a manifestation of God's wrath for the sins of the nation. So, was that not the chief purpose of the Assembly? After discussion it was agreed that the overture to be presented by the minister of Prestonpans<sup>12</sup> should be given due consideration: "More important meantime

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<sup>7</sup> Calderwood, op. cit., p. 395.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 395.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 396; Gillon, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 396; Gillon, op. cit., pp. 148-9.

<sup>12</sup> Saltprestown, or Salt Preston, as it was known then.

than how the enemy might be resisted, was the necessity for universal repentance and earnestly turning to God – the best preparation against national disaster.”<sup>13</sup> So, what did the Assembly do?

The Assembly asked Davidson to expound the catalogue of perceived chief offences and corruptions in all estates (kirk and government).<sup>14</sup> A couple of days later (the Wednesday) Davidson presented the catalogue of offences in ministers to which Andrew Melville wished to have the censures added to offences.<sup>15</sup> Terrible was the indictment made before the Assembly (we are told<sup>16</sup>). No one was spared, from the King down to the meanest subjects. *We* would not take this well. *We* would be deeply offended. But *then*, there was this profound conviction of the displeasure of the Lord at the slackness and downright corruptions in Church and society. It was shocking for ministers to hear. First,

- 1) *Sins of omission*: negligence of ministers not giving themselves to their books and the study of the Scriptures; not giving themselves to sanctification and prayer; not studying to be powerful and spiritual; not applying the word to corruptions, being too obscure and too scholastic, cold and wanting zeal, negligent in visiting the sick or caring for the poor; choosing parts of the word not relevant for the people; flattering and ‘dissembling public sins’ – how guilty of this is the Church of our day! Then there were,
- 2) *The positive sins* (that is to say, sins of commission). One said of these: “if only the merest fraction were true, one can appreciate the anxiety of good men like Davidson to see something in the nature of amendment and revival.” What were they? Light and wanton behaviour, as in gorgeous and light apparel and in speech; light and profane company, unlawful gaming; dancing, card-playing, etc.; swearers, profaners of the Sabbath, drunkards, fighters; lewd, flatterers, promise-breakers, etc. Those found guilty of such things were to be duly disciplined!

We might say, “How does that apply to us? Evangelicals do not behave anything like that way today, surely.” Yet, we have to be careful. There is nothing new under the sun. We have advanced technologies which can lead us down the garden path of sin and can be real time-wasters. We have the internet to contend with and access to all sorts of deviant and corrupt morality and covetousness and acquisitiveness. These things are not morally or spiritually neutral. We can easily, if we are not watchful, be sucked in to a secular and liberal frame of mind, not least by watching main news programmes! The fact is, it is easy to be a liberal (small ‘l’) because it is a ‘go with the flow’ *laissez faire* attitude to life. No restraints if you do not want them! Such a thing can so easily blunt spiritual life. It clearly did then, and it clearly does today. Our hearts can be a melting pot of declension and sin, even when all seems fine on the outside. But back to Davidson and the 1596 Assembly. What happened next? What was the result of all these indictments spelled out by Davidson in his submissions to the Assembly?

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<sup>13</sup> Gillon, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>14</sup> Calderwood, op. cit., p. 396.

<sup>15</sup> Among a committee of men appointed to consider this was the father of Walter Balcanquhal (1586-1645) who, an episcopalian and not a presbyterian like his father of the same name, was later appointed by James VI & I as a commissioner from the UK to the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).

<sup>16</sup> Calderwood, op. cit., pp. 401ff.

### V. *A Day of Humiliation Was Appointed*

The matter came before the Assembly on Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> March.<sup>17</sup> The result? *A day of humiliation*. The ordinance passed was this:

*Concerning the defections in the ministry, the same being at length read out, reasoned, and considered, the brethren concluded the same, agreeing therewith. And in respect that, by God's grace, they intend reformation, and to see the kirk and ministry purged, to the effect the work may have the better success, they think it necessary that this Assembly be humbled for wanting such care as became, in such points as are set down, and some zealous and godly brother in doctrine to lay them out for their better humiliation; and that they make solemn promise before the Majesty of God, and make new covenant with him, for a more careful and reverent discharge of their ministry. To the which effect was chosen Mr. John Davidson, and Tuesday next, at nine [o'clock] in the morning, appointed in the New Kirk [part of St Giles, Edinburgh] for that effect, whereunto none is to resort but the ministry.*<sup>18</sup>

This procedure was set on the Friday for the following Tuesday. None but those who were entitled to be present were admitted. The company consisted of 400 souls, all ministers or elders. So, how did the service go? Begun with prayer, Ezekiel chapters 13 and 34 were read, whereupon Davidson delivered a sermon/exhortation.<sup>19</sup>

*He was very moving in application to the present times, so that within an hour after they entered in the kirk, they looked with another countenance than that wherewith they entered. He exhorted them to enter into their private meditations, and to acknowledge their sins, with promise and purpose of amendment.*<sup>20</sup>

It was, by all accounts, solemn – you do not hear so much these days of solemn services. People are more comfortable with joyful themes, and certainly there is no joy like the Christian's joy; the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10)! But there is a place to be humbled before the Lord (James 4:7-10). So, what did Davidson urge? The purpose was confession of sin and promise of change. They were to enter a new covenant with the Lord [consecration] that by a spirit of repentance they might provoke others to follow their example. Davidson urged his hearers to examine themselves – you do not hear much of self-examination these days! Yet it is a constant need for the professing Christian.

Apparently, Davidson was moving in his appeals. That should always be an aspiration of preachers! An hour into the service he saw clearly that his hearers were moved and he exhorted to “private meditation and confession with promise and purpose of amendment.”<sup>21</sup> But then a remarkable spirit fell upon the gathering. A sudden outburst of emotion overcame many. For a quarter of an hour – just imagine it! – “the building resounded with the sobbing of strong men.” Sighs, sobs, shedding of tears, “so that the place might worthily have been called Bochim, for the

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 401. See also, Gillon, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155. Calderwood gives a ‘merest outline’ of it in his *History*, pp. 406-7.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 407.

<sup>21</sup> Gillon, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-7.

like of that day was never seen in Scotland since the Reformation, as every man confessed." This was no emotionless day or formal exercise of humiliation. Here was a gathering humbled on account of sin and lukewarmness.<sup>22</sup> After public confession and prayer Davidson continued. This was concerned with action, with a determination on their part for consecration to the service of the gospel. Rising from their seats and lifting up their right hands, with one voice they renewed their Covenant with God, "protesting to walk more warily in their ways and to be more diligent in their charges." We are told that the exercise continued till one o'clock in the afternoon (it had begun at 9 o'clock in the morning!).<sup>23</sup>

The whole exercise of humiliation, confession, and determination to amendment was enjoined from the Assembly upon the other Church courts, Synods and Presbyteries and congregations. This seems to have been taken up with enthusiasm. This was a sure sign of the reviving work of the Holy Spirit. One historian was to say: "this ordinance was obeyed with an alacrity and ardour which spread from synod to synod, from presbytery to presbytery, and from parish to parish, the inhabitants of one city saying to another, 'Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shalt not be forgotten,' till all Scotland, like Judah of old 'rejoiced at the oath.'"<sup>24</sup>

## VI. *The Wider Impact Resulting*

What about the effects of this among ministers and people? The Church historian David Calderwood was to say that 1596 was a remarkable year in the life of the Scottish Kirk. We can believe that the repentance and confession expressed at that Assembly had a transforming effect in the ministry of many and consequently impacted on the spiritual life of many individuals and congregations. Calderwood wrote that:

*The Kirk of Scotland was now come to her perfection, and the greatest purity that ever she attained unto, both in doctrine and discipline, so that her beauty was admirable to foreign Kirks. The assemblies of the saints were never so glorious nor profitable to every one of the true members thereof, than in the beginning of this year.*<sup>25</sup>

"There have been many days," he wrote, "of present or imminent dangers, but the like for sin and defection was there never since the Reformation."<sup>26</sup> Though the initial application of the 1596 overture was directed at ministers, the call to self-examination, repentance, confession and sanctification, with the blessing of the Spirit of the Living God, was a catalyst for the transformation of many individuals and congregations in Churches truly and deeply exercised in such things. Thus, this will not just be a great story from the past, but a personal call for the present for us to be likewise seriously exercised before the Lord.

As for John Davidson, he continued as faithful pastor of the congregation at Prestonpans until his passing in August 1604. Though largely unknown today, his biographer Moffat Gillon said of

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<sup>22</sup> The scene is beautifully described by David Calderwood in page 407 of his *History*. See also Gillon, p. 157. For the significance of 'Bochim', see Judges 2:1-6.

<sup>23</sup> Calderwood, op. cit., p. 407.

<sup>24</sup> Gillon, op. cit., p. 159. See, Thomas M'Crie, *The Story of the Scottish Church*, London, 1875, p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> Calderwood, op. cit., pp. 387-8.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 407.



him (admittedly with just a touch of hyperbole) that “it is true that the Scottish Church has had few greater men and few who have been listened to with greater respect and greater purpose by their brethren...It can be affirmed with confidence that no braver or more disinterested man has ever championed the rights of Christ’s Kirk and of the Kingdom of God in Scotland.”<sup>27</sup>

## VII. *John Davidson Redivivus?*

We move to Edinburgh again, this time to the annual Free Church Assembly meeting towards the end of May in 1844. It was another remarkable occasion akin to what had happened two hundred and forty-eight years earlier. There had been an awareness at the Disruption the previous year of awakenings touching many parts of the country. Overtures came in to that second Free Church Assembly to take up the matter of personal religion as a priority amongst the proceedings. Consequently, it was decided to set apart Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> May, as a day of humiliation and prayer, with a sermon to be preached by Charles J. Brown of Edinburgh. Members of Assembly were to engage in a religious conference. “I shall deeply regret,” said R. S. Candlish, “if we enter into any consultation as to what ought to be done before we have thoroughly and truly humbled ourselves in the sight of God, and spread out before Him our sins and failings.”<sup>28</sup>

Brown in his introductory remarks set the scene:

*[The] conference [was] not so much to speak to one another as to speak to the Lord our God, and pour out our hearts before Him in sorrowful confession of our many, many shortcomings and sins, in order that, betaking ourselves to the fountain of Immanuel’s blood, and taking hold of the strength of the good and holy Spirit of Christ, we may humbly and heartily offer ourselves to the Lord, that if He have any delight in us, and if we have found grace in His sight, it may please Him in infinite mercy to make some use of us as His instruments in the great work on which His heart is set, and for which the Son of God died.*<sup>29</sup>

I dare say such a thing should be the primary feature of all our Church courts and meetings! The sermon of Brown’s was memorable and moving. He preached from Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 1: “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.” There was heart-searching for all in the Assembly: “Oh, it were well if we this day heard the great and gracious One addressing to each of us the inquiry: ‘Lovest thou Me?’ Blessed if we are able in humble hope to answer. ‘Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee!’” He went on to lay open the low state of their souls and of religion in their own hearts. Among other things, “How is a minister to teach to others the ways of God unless he is walking close and straight in them himself? How shall he lay open the sins of others, not harshly, but tenderly, unless he is seeing and mourning in secret over his own?”<sup>30</sup> Brown was direct, and did not leave himself out:

<sup>27</sup> Gillon, op. cit., p. 251. Gillon (1883-1954) was a Church of Scotland minister and was a long-serving Secretary of the Scottish Reformation Society. His earthly remains were interred in the Grange Cemetery in Edinburgh.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption*, Edinburgh, 1893, p. 628.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 628. Italicised words in the original.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 629.

*"The Word of God is the weapon we must wield, but the only way to get to the very heart of the Word is nothing else than living on it ourselves in secret. What guilt lies on us in this matter. We who ought to have been ensamples to the flock, who have had so many and peculiar advantages for walking with God, alas, our distance from Him has all but paralysed our ministry. We have not dealt in the secret place of the Most High. His Word has not dwelt richly within us."*

This was John Davidson *redivivus* (=alive again!). "What mischief have we thus done to souls – what good have we failed to do – what endless opportunities have we lost! 'Have mercy on us, O God!'" His sermon was unsparing and searched out the secrecies of the heart, as well as the course of life and work in the ministry of the Gospel. It produced a reaction – and a good one among the fathers and brethren. There was, we are told, "a deep, solemn melting of heart on his own part, and that of his audience."<sup>31</sup> "Many a head was bowed, and here and there amidst the Assembly men were silently seeking relief in tears." "Men's hearts were full; the Assembly remained for a time hushed in silence. It seemed as if members were afraid to disturb the solemnity of the scene; as if it would be best for each to retire and enter into his closet, and shut the door behind him."<sup>32</sup>

### VIII. Conclusion

What does this do for those who are supportive of the ministry of the Word and Gospel these days? Does it not send us to the secret place and to our knees before the great God of Heaven, and the exalted Saviour to plead for such penitence and humility before Him, preachers and hearers, and for experiences of the Spirit's quickening in these days – in our churches, in our ministries and in our families and communities – and in our divinity faculties! It amounts to a longing for revival – personal revival in our souls and in our ministries and churches. In Psalm 85 the Psalmist cries: "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (v6). We read in Habakkuk: "O LORD, I have heard thy speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy" (3:2). Thousands were saved at Pentecost (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4). "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip" (8:5-6). This is what God can do! We will know something is happening spiritually when preaching, prayer and Scripture stir us to a renewed piety and devotion to Christ, and fill us with a zeal for God, for truth and for the salvation of souls. We will know something is happening spiritually in the churches when Christ and His Word are once again accorded authority by them in all matters of faith and life. Let us pray for such an anointing of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our day! What can we cry but: "Lord Jesus, hasten such a day!"

### About the author

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 629.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 630.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### When Christians Face Persecution: Theological Perspectives from the New Testament

*Chee-Chiew Lee, InterVarsity Press (2022), 224pp, (£16.99 ivpbooks.com)*

As the global church continues to grapple with the task of defining what truly constitutes persecution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Chee-Chiew Lee's latest work *When Christians Face Persecution: Theological Perspectives from the New Testament* serves as a timely reminder to utilise biblical theology for contemporary issues.

Lee introduces her work with an attempt to define persecution and delineate its scope, using the definition given in the *Cambridge English Dictionary* as her basis. The term "persecution" is subsequently distinguished from the terminology of "opposition", "suffering for Christ", "conforming to social pressure" and "martyrdom". Lee only provides a simple definition of persecution of Christians in the second chapter of the work, although she simultaneously cites a distinction between the plural "persecutions" and "official persecution". This could prove to be either confusing or could simply allow for a more flexible reading of the term which can be adapted for various contexts. Additionally, Lee argues for a wider reading of a "theology of *facing* persecution", presenting the opportunity for practical and contemporary application of what is learned from the Bible, rather than an overly theoretical "theology of persecution".

Such a foundation of theologising for those who face persecution appears to also allow for a wider reading of biblical texts. In chapter one, Lee presents the historical background of the New Testament writers, explaining the worldview of the time which insisted on a consistent intertwining of its social, religious, and political elements. Lee also helpfully distinguishes between the perspectives of "insiders" (those facing persecution) and "outsiders" (those partaking in persecution at the time, e.g. authorities, Jews and pagans), which allows for a more fully-formed understanding of the reasons behind persecution. This then leads to descriptions of persecution, both "unofficial" and "official", as found in the New Testament in chapter two. These vary from threats to be cast out of the synagogue to violent punishments. Lee consistently cites New Testament authors throughout this work and does so while laying great emphasis on their intentions and the literary techniques which they use. This emphasis is evident in Lee's presentation of Christian responses to persecution in the New Testament, as she for instance compares texts in Mark, Matthew and Luke addressing apostasy and assimilation, which is one of the multiple responses to persecution. Due to the different language used by New Testament authors to address the issue of persecution, Lee argues that while these authors have a variety of opinions on the same topic, these opinions are not contradictory and instead reflect diversity. This conclusion is refreshing and can be seen as a reflection of Lee's own perspective as a *Majority World* author and Langham scholar, who wishes to encourage unity in diversity.

The third and final main study of this work focuses on the New Testament authors' aims to persuade Christians to persevere and empower them to do so. This study leans heavily on the

examination of rhetoric in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, in particular the techniques of appealing to *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*, and utilising the language of honour and shame. The study then goes on to address eight separate sections of the New Testament and how each author persuades the Christians to persevere in their faith. Although helpful in its distinct elements, this study can be seen as somewhat cursory due to the short sections dedicated to each author or book of the Bible. Small sections of hugely enlightening teaching addressing topics such as fear and God's protection run the risk of being overlooked as the reader is swept up in the author's haste to move on to the next sub-study. The 170-page book benefits from the brevity of this study overall, as the book is certainly accessible in its length, however, more dedication to each sub-study in the third chapter would not have been unwelcome.

The conclusion to this work is two-fold, with a section to address the arguments made in the main studies and a section of practical contemporary application. In the preceding chapters, the conclusions for the studies are placed under the heading of "Summary of theological perspectives"; these summaries are hugely helpful and give excellent overviews of the preceding text. They also help to refocus the reader on the topic of biblical theology and its practical application, aligning with the purpose of the book. It is therefore in keeping with the work that the conclusory section of the book is engaging and thought-provoking. Lee warns against a simplistic understanding of persecution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which could follow one extreme of not identifying any persecution to the other extreme of identifying any kind of opposition as persecution. She calls for sensitive application of biblical teaching which acknowledges cultural differences. Moreover, she calls for empathy towards those who are facing persecution, highlighting how the global church can benefit from a variety of perspectives and reflections which have been developed in various contexts across the world. It is a challenge in the church context of the United Kingdom to consider that a practical application of biblical theology is an emotional response rather than an organisational initiative or a local church programme.

Overall, this work is of great benefit to the global church due to its consistently coherent usage of scripture, and its impactful study of the social, religious, and political contexts of the biblical authors. The book's format of designated sections means it could easily be used alongside a larger work such as a bible commentary to give a different and refreshing perspective on New Testament passages. We thank Chee-Chiew Lee for this work and we continue to pray for our brothers and sisters who are facing persecution due to their faith in Jesus Christ.

**Màiri MacPherson**

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## Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution

*Carl Trueman, Crossway (2022), 204 pp, (£9.99 Amazon)*

In 2020 Carl Trueman published the 400-odd page book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. Widely hailed as a momentous and timely work, it provided a detailed history of the intellectual developments that have revolutionised Western culture's understanding of the nature of human beings. Today people accept (and legislate to protect) the claim that a man can be trapped in a woman's body – Trueman's explanation of how that came to be is vital reading – but many struggle to work through the lengthy book he published. So a revised, condensed book has been published to explain the vital insights to a wider audience.

The more concise book – *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* is a mere 200 pages and has no footnotes. *Strange New World* is a fresh book, which conveys Trueman's insights in a more punchy way for its brevity. The new book gives more acknowledgment to the role of technology in spreading the impact of intellectual ideas, and even includes some reflections on the nature of historical causation – offsetting the critique of giving exclusive privilege to intellectual ideas in culture formation.

The first chapter introduces readers to the term “expressive individualism”, a term – coined by Robert Bellah – which suggests people in our culture so live as to express their radical core of individual feeling, performing on the stage of a world which is expected to recognise and affirm whatever is felt to be desirable or real within the subject. Trueman's argument is that our culture is now one of radical expressive individualism “refracted through the ‘idioms of the sexual revolution.’” (29) In such a culture a person's inner desires and self-understanding take precedence over physical and biological realities. Hence the power of transgender ideology in our culture.

Chapters 2 through 5 outline the historical narrative of intellectual ideas that have made our culture one of expressive individualism. Descartes, Rousseau, Shelly, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Reich are discussed with verve, wit and fairness. Quotations from all are given, their significance noted – but much detail present in the larger book is passed over. Reading this section of the book one is reminded of earlier writers who served the church with similar concise historical studies of intellectual genealogies – Francis Schaeffer and David Wells most notably.

These chapters are not intended as “a watertight account of why we modern men and women think intuitively about the world” (108) as we do, but it more than meets Trueman's goal of explaining how the revolutionary outlook of the majority of people in our culture is from their perspective “coherent and explicable.” (109)

Chapter 6 introduces some concepts that further help us understand our times, including “The Politics of Recognition” (115) and “Imagined Communities” (117). The role of technology in providing the contraceptive pill and the Internet are discussed. “If technology in the form of the pill helped to undermine traditional sexual codes, then in the form of the Internet it helps weaken the traditional narratives.” (119)

Chapters 7 and 8 explore the effects of the revolution. Firstly the way victimhood served to draw transgender activists into an illogical and tense alliance with homosexuals, and then in the challenges to freedoms once cherished – that of speech and religion.

The concluding chapter focuses on the Church – “Strangers in This Strange World.” Here Trueman calls us to admit the ways we have imported the world’s expressive individualism into our churches – we often put personal preferences and taste before doctrinal convictions. Here there are echoes of David Wells’ charge against the churches of embracing consumerism. The positive advice given to believers is gold dust - and very, very rarely heard in the UK. Trueman suggests we have all too often succumbed to a form of evangelism that reinforces the culture’s anti-God convictions of expressive individualism, as we appeal to felt needs and a consumer mentality. In contrast to this Trueman calls on us to “see what ways we have compromised with the spirit of the age. Then, we need to repent.” (172) He calls for a renewed commitment to church that learns from the Ancient Church (173) and counter-intuitively commends not only Natural Law but also the vital need to teach not only on the controversial issues, but the whole counsel of God. People need, through the experience of gathered worship, the Psalms and confessional theology, to regain intuitions that counter the culture’s expressive individualism. Reading Trueman’s call of the Church back to biblical Christianity, one is heartened that his self-confessed “depressing” (169) narrative does not actually lead us to be pessimistic - but rather to embrace “Christian hope” which is “realistic.” (185)

This book is immensely important. Many in UK churches are trying to keep running the staffing, outreach, programming and services that since the 1970s have had their roots in the expressive individualism which is unquestioned (often enforced) in many schools, universities and workplaces. People need to understand how different biblical Christianity is from (rapidly falling) church attendance and consumer driven events. Deeply held biblical convictions are all but absent from the teenage generation ahead of us. Many readers will know those who have changed their views on sexuality matters when it became costly to hold to God’s Word in work or family. Very few churches are prepared for the world Trueman pulls the curtains back on, where freedom of speech and religion are not legally protected as they once were.

Every Christian should read this book or, if they prefer, the longer version. We will not keep alive our love for God, nor will we be faithful to our calling, unless we not only understand, but become different to, the world. This book helps with both in ways that few other resources do.

Strange New World includes three or four reflective questions at the end of each chapter which would work well for group discussions in a home group context. That can be supplemented with 10-12 minute video discussions and a separate study guide – advertised in the book and helpful for churches that want to read the book together. I would commend any church to do so.

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