Introduction

The enormity of the task still facing Christian missions is almost incomprehensible. Nearly 4.1 billion people are still in need of the gospel (Johnstone 2014:65). In some ways, the task of reaching the unreached is most difficult among Muslims. With nearly 1.3 billion adherents, Islam represents a significant challenge to the spread of the gospel. Or does it? Given the complex nature of the relationship between Christianity and Islam, could it be that the inability of Christian missionaries to shed the social, cultural, and political trappings of the West and Christendom have limited the effectiveness of the gospel? Might the cleansing of the gospel of its cultural trapping result in the release of its power among Muslims? If this is to be done, the “leaven” of the gospel must be separated from the “lump” of dough that is culture (Whitehouse 2008:7). As the gospel has spread from its origins in Judea to the far corners of the world, it has repeatedly changed its cultural form and shape. Is it time for the gospel to once again change its form and shape (Walls1996:6)? Many who have spent time in missionary work among Muslims—who have sought to distinguish between the “leaven and the lump”—recognize the existence of what are called “insider movements” and promote them as viable contextualized models of Christian community. In this paper, I give an overview of the history of these insider movements, then describe paradigms for understanding the concept of identity as it relates to “insiders” before examining the theological lenses through which insider movements can be viewed. Finally, I will briefly address several lessons that can be learned from this overview of insider movements. I use the
term “insider movement” generically to define the broad concept of someone coming to Jesus while remaining within their cultural, social, and communal context.

**Insider Movements Among Muslims: An Overview**

One of the earliest known advocates of what would later be called “Insider Movements” among Muslims was the longtime missionary to Anatolia, Henry Riggs. Riggs was appointed the secretary of the Near-East Christian Council (NECC) (Vander Werff 1977:262). Based in Beirut, Lebanon, the NECC’s goal was to attempt to understand “the causes of the ‘relative sterility’ of efforts for the conversion of Moslems” (Riggs 1941:116). Riggs’ report was presented at the Missionary Conference at Tambaram, Madras, 1938 and published in *The Moslem World* in 1941 (Vander Werff 1977:262, 263).

The Riggs document outlines two main obstacles for the conversion of Muslims: first, “Muslim distortion of biblical ideas” and, second, communal solidarity and loyalty (263; Riggs 1941:116, 117). In order to overcome the first type of obstacles, Riggs emphasizes the need to avoid antagonizing Muslims by focusing on the person of Jesus and the reading of the Gospels. The implication being that overcoming Muslim distortions is possible if care is taken not to antagonize them (119, 120).

For Riggs, the second category of objection is far more serious and presents a greater challenge. To illustrate the gravity of this challenge, Riggs’ report expresses the sentiments of the NECC in a series of quotes that emphasizes the challenge of separating Muslim converts from their communities:

Every convert to Christianity is a dead loss to the community.

The Moslem Community is a noble and sacred thing, a social-political-religious fellowship for which the believer is willing to give his life.

The greatest handicap against which the Christian Missionary has to strive is the power of Moslem solidarity.

There are thousands of men and women who believe in Christ and are trying to follow him, but they cannot bring themselves to face the break with their own community. (117)

This need to find a way for Muslims to remain in their communities as transformed and changed followers of Jesus led Riggs to suggest a radical approach and “a way around these obstacles” (119). In this approach
converts would be encouraged to stay within their communities as hidden believers who do not publicly convert or proclaim their faith. “The purpose of such a course is to make possible a more effective witness, in life, in words, in the reading of the Gospels, to the power of Christ in their own lives” (119). The ultimate goal of such a life would be to form groups of co-believers that are essential to the life of any follower of Christ. By advocating that Muslims remain within their socio-political-religious contexts, Riggs was far ahead of his time by anticipating what would later come to be known as insider movements (Miller 2013:67).

These ideas put forward by Riggs and the NECC were soundly rejected by the Missionary Conference at Tambaram in 1938 (Vander Werff 1977:263). Additionally, Samuel Zwemer and William Hocking wrote rebuttals in *The Moslem World* in the same issue where the Riggs report was published (Travis and Woodberry 2015:15). In 1944 and 1947 articles supportive of Riggs and advocating further study were published in *The Moslem World*. But, for better or for worse, the time of insider movements had not yet arrived.

The period between the Riggs report and 1970 saw relatively little movement in creative approaches to Muslim evangelism. However, Donald McGavran made an important contribution to missiology that would eventually have an impact on the understanding of insider movements with the 1955 publication of *Bridges to God*. In this work, McGavran launched what would later come to be known as the “Church Growth Movement” (McIntosh 2005:17). McGavran’s key insight related to insider movements is his concept of “people movements to Christ.” Through his experience in India, McGavran noticed that in some areas whole groups of people were becoming Christian. In his quest to find out why, he came to see the importance of people remaining in their communal contexts. When people remain as disciples within their local contexts they have the possibility of having a greater impact on their family, friends, and neighbors. This influence led to group movement to Christ in ways that extraction of converts could not. Thus, McGavran became a strong advocate of discipling people within their own social contexts (Waterman 2013:292; McGavran 1955:111).

Charles Kraft’s concept of dynamic equivalence also made a significant contribution to the development of insider movements (Waterman 2013:295). Drawing on his theory of dynamic equivalence in translation, Kraft argued that the churches need to be freed from the trappings of outside cultures. They should be allowed to “make explicit the relationship between the New Testament examples of churchness and contemporary expressions” (Kraft 1973:55, 56). Kraft makes the case that the church should be malleable to any given culture. The form and shape it takes
should be based on scriptural principles but released from the trappings of the outside “missionary” culture. Combining McGavran’s emphasis on people staying in their social context with Kraft’s idea of a dynamic equivalent church, it was only an incremental step to the concept of insider movements. By the 1970s, these streams of innovation began to coalesce as multiple theorists sought to apply them to Muslim outreach (taken from Waterman’s five important factors contributing to the development of insider movements 2013).

A number of different articles pushing the boundaries of traditional mission to Muslims were published in the late 1970s and in 1976 the 3rd issue of Missiology was entirely dedicated to Muslim missions (Travis and Woodberry 2015:18, 19). Notably, Martin Goldsmith described the all-encompassing nature of Islam, the difficulties faced by a Muslim trying to leave his or her community, and the need to address the Muslim community as a means to reaching individual Muslims (1976:318, 320). John D. C. Anderson asked, “Is it possible for a man to be a child of God, a worshiper of Christ, and still fall under the broad national and cultural category of being a Muslim?” In describing the successes of Bible correspondence courses in parts of Asia, John Wilder was optimistic about the possibility of spontaneous “Christward Movements” taking place among Muslims (1977:301). Thus by the end of the decade a body of literature questioning the issues of identity and approaches to Muslim conversion started to take shape.

In 1980 Phil Parshall published his New Paths in Muslim Evangelism. This systematic outline for contextualization of the gospel for Muslims is based on his experience in Bangladesh (Waterman 2013:294). Although Parshall has been openly critical of insider movements, he advocated a culturally sensitive approach to Muslim evangelism pushing the boundaries beyond what many missionaries to Muslims had formerly thought acceptable. Parshall sought to deeply understand the culture of the Muslims he worked with and adapt the gospel as much as possible to their context. His approach has been used as a stepping-stone by many who promote insider movements.

Another key component in the development of insider movements was the 1981 publication of Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader. Edited by Ralph Winter Perspectives made accessible ideas of culture, contextualization, and creative approaches to evangelism to many preachers, teachers, missionaries, and lay members. Additionally, the

founding of the William Carey Library by Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission, and over seen by Winter, led to the publication and dis-tribution of much ground-breaking theory on mission, including ideas of insider movements. In the early 1980s the International Journal of Frontier Missions (IJFM) was founded and Winter used it to consistently publish articles on innovations in mission practice, including articles favorable to insider movements (Waterman 2013:294).

With the increase of scholarly literature on contextual strategies for reaching Muslims generated in the 1970s and 1980s, it was only a matter of time before these approaches were tried in the field. In the 1980s missionaries and agencies began to experiment with new contextualized insider approaches. Dudley Woodberry describes the success of one of these experiments in an Asian country (1989:304-306). A Seventh-day Adventist, Jerald Whitehouse, launched a successful experimental project using insider methods to reach Muslims in 1989 (Roenfeldt 2005:34). These projects have multiplied and diversified in scope and context (Travis and Woodberry 2015:31, 32). Maturing experiments during the 1990s generated a lot of excitement from proponents as well as calls for caution from other members of the mission community. As people took sides and the debates began, it became obvious that clearer definitions were needed. In order to describe the nature of various models of mission to Muslims, John Travis published his “C-spectrum” in 1998 (1998:407, 408). The C-spectrum will be examined in more detail in the next section but it is important to note the significance of this contribution for framing the debate surrounding insider movements.

The theological debate on insider movements continues to this day. A notable recent contribution to the debate is the book length polemic published in 2011 entitled Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel (Lingel, Morton, and Nikides 2011). Another contribution is the monumental 2015 volume edited by Harley Talman and John Travis entitled Understanding Insider Movements that offers a wide range of information about the origin, nature, and theology of insider movements.

In the past 40 years numerous Muslims have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Some have moved into exile, others have joined adjacent local communities, and still others have remained in their own socio-cultural-religious context following Jesus as best they can. The proponents of insider movements would like to see this latter group nurtured and, perhaps, expanded. Everyone would like to see lives transformed as people learn about Jesus. But how far can the gospel go as it is adapted to different cultural contexts? And what does it mean to be an insider? The following section will seek to explain the complexities of insider identity.
Inside Insiderness: Understanding the Paradigms of Insiderness

In order to understand “insider movements” a clear definition of “insider” is needed. Without a clear definition, the arguments of proponents and critics have little value. What does it mean to be an insider? Defining any identity is fraught with difficulty and defining insiderness in the context of insider movements is no exception. In this section I will discuss the models created by John Travis, Tim Green, and Warrick Farah in order to better understand how insiderness has been defined. The section will conclude with lessons that can be learned from these models.

John Travis’ Model

As the pioneering insider movements began to mature in the 1990s, the need of clearly defining the terms and descriptions of the debate led John Travis to develop what has become known as the “C-spectrum (1998:407, 408). The C-spectrum was developed by John Travis as a tool to explain the different kinds of “Christ-centered” communities he had observed during his work among Muslims. In Travis’ model, C1 and C2 are generally viewed as overtly Christian communities with the main difference being the language used. C1 uses outsider language such as English or Greek (i.e., in an Arabic context) while C2 uses the local language with a distinctively Christian vocabulary. In C3 and C4, contextualization is taken more seriously. Culturally appropriate dress and forms of worship may be used. Neutral religious language may be used. In the case of C4 communities, insider religious language is used. For example, Jesus is referred to as Isa. C4 believers would not consider themselves “Christians” but rather “followers of Jesus.”

The most controversial position on the C-spectrum is C5. C5 believers would continue to identify themselves as Muslims who follow Isa. They would live and act as Muslims within their communities. Muslim theology that is explicitly against the Bible would be “rejected, or reinterpreted if possible” (408).

The C-spectrum has framed the debate about Insider Movements since its publication. Though most missiologists and missionaries have generally accepted C4 communities, heated debate surrounds the concept of C5 communities and there has been a great deal published against C5 communities (see for example Parshall 1998:404-410; Parshall, “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization”; and Lingel, Morton, and Nikides 2011). Many of these debates have happened in the context of prescriptive mission study rather than as descriptive analysis of the experience of Muslim Backgrounds Believers (MBB). Travis states in his introduction
to the C-spectrum that “the purpose of the spectrum is to assist church planters and Muslim background believers to ascertain which type of Christ-centered communities may draw the most people from the target group to Christ and best fit in a given context” (1998:407). The C-spectrum has been useful for many involved in these kinds of ministries, however, it does not fully explain the complexities of identity as experienced by a Muslim coming to faith in Jesus Christ for the first time (Farrah 2015:85, 86; Green 2013:362).

Tim Green’s Model

Tim Green makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of insider identity in his 2013 article “Beyond the C-Spectrum” (2013). Drawing on the social sciences, Green argues for a three-part construction of identity: collective, social, and core. Collective identity is determined by the group and answers the question, “Who are we in relation to other groups.” Social identity is determined by the individual and answers the question, “Who I am within my group?” Also determined by the individual is core identity or, “Who am I to myself.” By splitting identity into three parts, Green’s model helps bring needed nuance to the discussion of insider identity. Figure 1 illustrates Green’s paradigm.

Using Green’s model helps us understand the complexities faced by people who come to Christ. When coming to Christ, does a Muslim need to identify as a follower of Christ on all three levels? Is it possible to be a Christian in one’s core-identity but a Muslim in one’s social and collective identity? What would a “core” Christian look like? With this model Green brings the debate to the question of personal and group identity from the emic perspective where identity is ultimately experienced.

![Figure 1: Identity at three levels. Source: Green 2013:361-380.](Image)
Warrick Farah’s Model

In an attempt to further explain the complexities of identity faced by MBBs, Warrick Farah developed what some have called a ladder of insiderness (2015:85-91). In Farah’s model there are five kinds of insiders: (1) Cultural Insiders: believers who remain in their own culture as a new believer and typically leave behind their old social and communal connections to join a new culturally similar community, (2) Sociocultural Insiders: believers who can remain in their “social networks in some contexts” (87), (3) Dual Belonging Insiders: believers who manage to identify as Christians at the core-level while at the same time remaining connected to their community, (4) Reinterpreting Insider: believers who manage to hold a core-Christian identity while reinterpreting the ritual elements of Islam in the light of orthodox Christian theology, and (5) Syncretistic Insider: Christian believers who mix Christian and Muslim theology in a syncretistic way. Farah’s chart (see Table 1) is most helpful in understanding his ladder of insiderness.

Table 1: Five expressions of insiderness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Expressions of Insiderness</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Communal</th>
<th>Ritual</th>
<th>Theological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0. Exile (or Refugee)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cultural Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sociocultural Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dual Belonging Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>o/?</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reinterpreting Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Syncretistic Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i/?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

i = insider; o = outsider; ? = occasional exception or ambiguous

Source: Farah 2015:86.

By dividing identity into multiple domains, Farah allows for more nuance in insiderness. Even so, some might argue that Farah’s model is reductionistic, forcing identity into a neat box. Nevertheless, this can be useful as a heuristic tool to help outsiders understand some of the challenges faced by insiders as disciples of Jesus.

Oscar Osindo offers an illuminating analysis on MBB identity in the context of discipleship. One of his key observations is that Muslims often come to belief without the help of a church or missionary. He outlines three primary sources of conversion: First, socio-political triggers. Some begin to question their own faith due to terrorism or some other experience they have had and they come to believe in Jesus Christ. Second, a
miraculous experience of God. Many Muslims have come to faith through visions, dreams, or other direct encounters with God. And third, through direct missionary effort. Sometimes this is in the form of media ministry, public evangelism, or personal evangelism. It is notable that two out of three of these causes of conversion are outside of human control. As a result, insiderness is not necessarily something planned for or promoted. It is often the result of the Spirit of God working among Muslims (Osindo 2016:229, 230).

Analysis of Insider Identity

What can we learn from all this? First, it is important to recognize that much of the discussion surrounding insider movements is descriptive rather than prescriptive. The idea of insiderness is a natural phenomenon that needs to be understood with the goal of improving the Christian experience of those whom Jesus has called to himself. The best use of insider models is as tools that help us explain and understand the complexities of the challenges faced by new believers in the Muslim context. As John Travis has stated, he intended his C-spectrum to be used as a descriptive tool for explaining the experience of MBBs (2015:358). There may be a time for the missionary or Christian agency to prescriptively plan for and support insider movements. But it is important to recognize that has been the Holy Spirit who has often initiated such movements to Christ.

Second, insider identity must be understood to be fluid and complex. Culturally and geographically the Muslim world is extremely large and diverse. The experience of a new believer in Bangladesh may be very different from the experience of a new believer in Egypt or Turkey. The resultant identity of the new believer will depend on many social, legal, and communal factors. It is, after all, the believer’s identity. They need to be allowed to form their own identity as believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Osindo 2016:237). Farah’s and Green’s models make helpful additions to this discussion because they add needed complexity and nuance to the concept of identity and insiderness. However, I cannot help but wonder if they are sufficiently complex and nuanced. Might there be more room for work in the area of identity and insiderness?

Third, models of insider identity need to allow for a progression of discipleship. If the insider identity is constructed in such a way that it allows for change over time as new truth is acquired and the leading of the Holy Spirit is felt, then few should fear insider identity; however, if the insider identity becomes locked in to syncretism and inflexibility, then the category becomes less useful. Perhaps Farah’s model would be useful in the development of MBB discipleship paradigms and curricula. For example,
MBB discipleship could be tailored to help a level 5 “Syncretistic Insider” move toward a less syncretic understanding of the gospel.

**Understanding the Theological Lenses of Insider Movements**

The concept of insider movements has generated considerable debate in Christian mission circles. There are theological questions that need to be clearly understood and satisfactorily answered. Christianity in the West has developed such a complex milieu of belief and practice that distinguishing Christianity from Western “Christian Culture” is fraught with difficulty. The very existence of insider movements strikes at the heart of this Western conception of Christianity. In this section I will briefly review Leonard Bartlotti’s 9 lenses for evaluating Christian beliefs about insider movements before focusing on what I see as the three most important theological questions facing insider movements.

Leonard Bartlotti has provided a helpful framework for Christians who are trying to understand insider movements. Originally presented at the Bridging the Divide Consultation held in New York in 2011, “Leo’s Lenses” provide a matrix of nine areas for interrogating both our personal theologies as well as the theologies of insider movements (Bartlotti 2015:56). Bartlotti’s nine theological lenses are ecclesiology, authority, culture, pneumatology, history, doing theology, other religions, Islam, and conversion-initiation. Figure 2 provides a clear description of these lenses.

Bartlotti believes that each of the issues outlined in these nine lenses should be held in tension. It is incumbent on the holder of one extreme position to provide a theological rational for ignoring the perspective of the other side. Only after locating our own presuppositions on this scale should we then, before making any judgments, seek to understand the other perspective (Bartlotti 2015:57). I find the issues surrounding ecclesiology, culture, and other religions particularly important to the discussion of insider movements because they exert considerable gravity on the other issues. How one answers the question of ecclesiology has great import to the issues of authority, pneumatology, history, and conversion-initiation. How we define culture strongly impacts how we do theology as well as our understanding of conversion-initiation. And our conception of other religions contributes to how we view Islam.
The conception of the nature of the community of God’s people that is called the church is crucial to understanding and evaluating insider movements. In his conception of ecclesiology, Bartlotti begins with a relatively small definition of ecclesiology that emphasizes the nature and practice of local communities. The Dictionary of Mission Theology emphasizes that a right understanding of the church is both local and global (Corrie 2007:51). At the local level, a church is supposed to support the spiritual life of its members as they seek to live out God’s plan in their lives. At the global level, the church represents the unity of all believers as the “bride of Christ” looking forward to the great wedding day. It is the level of the global church where the concept of insider movements is criticized.
Insiders, by nature, do not identify themselves with the visible Western Christian church or the Western conception of the “global church.” The desire to remain in their community contexts often locks insiders into a social-political antagonism toward the West and therefore global Christianity. The history of Christian-Muslim relations continues to arouse feelings of antagonism among Muslims today. Starting with the Islamic conquest of Christian lands shortly after the death of Muhammed and exacerbated by the Crusades, Muslim and Christians have had a long and destructive history. The discovery and exploitation of oil in the Middle East in the 20th century has led to Western political meddling in the region that has reignited age-old antagonisms and extremism. Western mass media has fueled the view of the West, and by extension Christians, as immoral power-hungry infidels. All this history makes the idea of joining a “Christian Church” offensive to many Muslims.

Additionally, many Christians uncritically embrace their Western Christian Heritage. From the time of Constantine the Great in the 4th century, Christianity has intrinsically linked itself to Christendom as a religious and political unity. Many Western Christians simply accept the concept of Christendom as a historically sanctioned good and the “bride of Christ.” The historical triumph of good Christians over the evil pagans of Rome and nascent Europe is seen as the triumph of the church over evil. Too often, in the West, the moral authority of the United States and other European Christians is unquestioned. The Christian church in a “Christian America” is sometimes believed to be God’s tool on earth for the propagation and proclamation the gospel around the world. In this way, Western Christians often identify the church as an organization rather than as people (personal communication from Sue Russell 29 November 2017).

Many Muslims, however, rightly perceive the moral failures of the West. For them, following Jesus and joining the visible Western church is repugnant. Those favoring insider movements argue that the true global church need not be identified with the visible church (for a nuanced description of the Reformation understanding of the church and how it relates to insider movements see Travis 2015:282–83). The church is, by this definition, spiritual. Authority, pneumatology, history, theology, and conversion is worked out at the local level as Christ becomes the central focus and the Holy Spirit prompts and guides.

The implications of ecclesiology for insiders is clear. If the spiritual church is synonymous with the visible corporal Christian community, then all converts, regardless if they come from a Muslim, Hindu, or Atheist background, must publicly and knowingly join the visible church as defined in and by the West. However, if the church is viewed primarily as the spiritual people of God, without negating the need for local Christ-
centered fellowships, then the insider may be able to remain apart from and outside of the “Christian community.”

**Culture**

The concept and definition of culture also has a significant impact on how one understands insider movements. How important is culture as people seek to understand Christ, Scripture, and themselves? Is culture like wind that blows some branches this way and some branches the other way with the neutral, a-cultural, state of no wind being the natural position? Or is culture like the sea to the fish—all-encompassing and impossible to remove? Is the ability to create culture part of being created in the image of God? Is there a redeemed “Christian culture” to which all Christians must conform? Bartlotti uses Richard Niebuhr’s typology of Christ and Culture. Is “Christ ‘against culture’, ‘over’ culture, ‘in paradox with’ culture, ‘of’ culture, or ‘transforming’ culture” (Bartlotti 2015:60)? Identifying one’s own reflexive position on how Christ approaches and interacts with culture is the starting point. As humans, we have difficulty doing this.

One of the difficulties in discussing issues of culture is that as products of culture, humans often fail to comprehend the level to which they act in a cultural way. Similar to the fish in the sea, they swim in the water, they use the water, but they have no concept that there might be different seas. Being a fish means being in water. A fish living outside of the water is an abstraction that has no basis in reality. In 1966 Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman famously proposed the “social construction of reality” (1967). In this view, culture and society provides the very basis of reality. Consequently, when humans think about another culture they are thinking about it from within their own culture, not as neutral objective observers.

The implication of the concept of culture on insider movements is clear. If Christ functions in every culture to “transform” it from the inside, then all Christians everywhere can be identified as “insiders.” American Christians are “insiders” seeking to follow Christ as best they can in their given cultural context. Similarly, an Arab “insider” would be seeking to follow Christ and transform his own culture from the inside.

**Other Religions**

Coming to a biblical understanding of other religions is import in the discussion of insider movements. Those who have worked among Muslims have at times been criticized for using the world “Allah” for “God” and for reading the Quran. There is an all too common feeling among
some Christians that any religious form that is not explicitly “Christian” must be renounced.

Hugh Goddard summarizes three basic positions that have been held by Christians with regard to other religions. These are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (2000:150). Though these three positions may be over simplifications, they provide a helpful framework for understanding the relationship of insider movements to their religious contexts. The exclusivist emphasizes the necessity for individuals to join and become part of the sacramental church, fully aware of Christ’s activity on their behalf. The inclusivist allows for the saved to be found among any people anywhere based on an inner understanding of their own need for a savior and faith in this unknown power. The pluralist believes that if there is salvation it can be found within and through the many expressions of human religion. Consequently, though the New Testament clearly states that Christ is the only means of salvation (John 14:6), there is debate on how his grace is applied (Bartlotti 2015:66). Is it applied to anyone who knowingly or unknowingly puts their faith in him? Is it possible for someone to have “unknowing” faith in Christ? And can saving faith be said to exist within non-Christian communities?

One of the concepts that can aid in understanding other religions is the semiotic concept of “form” and “meaning” (Hiebert 1989:109). The “form” is a vehicle that can carry multiple “meanings.” What a “form” “means” is determined by the socio-linguistic context of the groups or individuals using the form. For example, the word “Allah” is used by Arab Christians to describe the Christian God as well as by Muslims to describe the Islamic God. The form of the word remains the same but the attached meaning changes. In a discussion of other religions, it is vital to be able to distinguish between the forms used and the meanings that are understood. There may be forms that are intrinsically evil, such as the temple prostitution practiced in the first century Roman world. These forms of worship must never be allowed. However, many forms are intrinsically neutral and may not need to be excluded simply because they are associated with some with unchristian ideas. Though great care should be taken when analyzing and attempting to change the meanings of religious forms, it is a necessary process as the gospel encounters any new socio-religious culture (117, 118).

The implications for insider movements are clear. Upon coming to faith in Christ, the insider then must examine his or her own religious practice and understanding. Forms that are explicitly against moral teaching or the Bible will need to be excluded. Neutral forms that are not explicitly against biblical principles can be repurposed for use by the insider. The more of these neutral forms that can be incorporated into the life of the
insider, the closer the insider will remain to his or her own community (117, 118). Closeness to one’s original socio-religious community allows the insider to witness in appropriate ways with less danger of being expelled or harmed.

**Implications**

Several implications can be drawn from this review of the history of insider movements, the question of insider identity, and the theological frameworks of the debate about insider movements. First, as with any appropriation of the gospel to a new context, the possibility of syncretism remains a constant challenge. Determining what is and what is not allowable by the Bible is difficult in new contexts. Those promoting insider movements, in particular, need to be wary of syncretism being incorporated into the beliefs and practices of those coming to faith in Jesus. As noted above, Farah’s 5th level of insider believer, the “Syncretistic Believer,” is one who fails to make a distinction between theologically Christian and theologically Muslim categories. While the boundaries of these categories continue to be debated, the threat of syncretism is very real. Insiders and those working with insiders need to be aware of the challenge of syncretism and plan for some sort of critical contextualization to make decisions on issues of belief and practice in context (for a discussion on contextualization see Hiebert 1987:104-112).

A second implication that arises from the history of insider movements is their inevitability. All followers of Jesus are, in one way or another, insiders. The only real question left to followers is how to be better followers in a given context. The cultural nature of humans means that people cannot help but follow Jesus within a specific culture. Thus, it is perfectly natural for a new Muslim follower of Jesus to ask, “How much of my culture do I need to leave behind?” It is unavoidable that people will attempt to reconcile their culture and habituated religious practice to Jesus and the gospel.

A third implication arises from the inevitability of insider movements. Understanding the inevitability of people following Jesus from their social and religious backgrounds, outsiders should sympathize with these followers of Jesus and seek to support them in their quest for a fuller understanding of him and his gospel. Debates about the theological frames surrounding insider movements should be allowed to continue in ways that will not harm new believers seeking to follow Christ better. Some Christians would do well to observe the advice given by Gamaliel in Acts 5:38-39, “If this plan of action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be

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found fighting against God” (NASB). It is unlikely that the theological questions surrounding insider movements will be resolved through debate. Only time will show how the Holy Spirit uses or does not use insiders as a means for the evangelization of Muslim people.

Conclusion

Around the world, countless Muslims are coming to faith in Jesus Christ. For those seeking to minister to these new followers of Christ it is vital to handle identity with sensitivity. When open conversion can mean exile or even death as well as effectively limiting witness, is there a different path? Can a new believer or group of believers remain as “insiders” within their communal context and still remain faithful to their new beliefs? In the 1930s Henry Riggs and others asked this question that others are still asking today (1941). This article has examined the history of insider movements among Muslims, presented three different models for understanding “insiderness,” and discussed theological frames that bound the debate about insider movements. The danger of syncretism, the inevitability of insider movements, and the need for outside Christians to take a supportive stance toward those seeking to follow Jesus are the key implications identified in this article. I have only presented the briefest overview of insider movements in the Muslim context; however, a fuller discussion of the topic would also include insider movements to Christ that are taking place with Hindu and Buddhist contexts.

Works Cited


After receiving his MDiv from Andrews University, Richard Doss served as a church pastor in Illinois before spending 9 years as a missionary in Kenya and Egypt. He now lives in Wilmore, Kentucky, where he is working on a PhD in Intercultural Studies at Asbury Seminary. His area of research is discipleship in the hopes of better understanding how people change through the power of God. Richard is married to Hadassah and has two daughters.