The Muslim Spiritual Progress Scale: Aiding Muslims in Coming to Christ

Introduction

No person with any knowledge of the facts can deny that coming to Christ and accepting him as one’s personal Savior from the religion of Islam is an enterprise fraught with difficulty. Societal expectations, family roles and pressure, religious dogma, inherent systemic prejudice, misapprehension of what Christianity is, a parallel holy book that often contradicts the Bible, a works-based approach to salvation, an exclusivist self-understanding that replaces the concept of the biblical remnant with the *Ummah* (the community of Muslims), a generalized misapprehension of the essence of Islam by Westerners, a confusion (on the part of Christians and Muslims alike) between Western commercialism and true Christianity, an often corrupt and poorly representative church, radicalization of some elements in the Islamic community, and strong punitive measures for those who convert out of Islam are just some of the major barriers that discourage serious investigation by Muslims of the gospel of Jesus Christ as presented in the Scriptures.

In spite of these challenges, there is a steady stream of conversions to Christ occurring from the ranks of those from a Muslim background. The numbers, although not a torrent, do represent an upsurge of individuals who are leaving the mosque and joining the church. *Jeune Afrique*, the French journal on Africa, estimated that in 2004, there were 500 converts to Christianity from Islam in Tunisia. They converted chiefly to three churches. A report on the website *Islam al-Yawm* estimated that in 2004 about 1,000 left Islam for Christianity in Morocco (Madany 2010). *Al-Majalla*, a journal estimated that there were at least 7,000 Christians in Morocco at that time. In 1992, according to estimates by the French Journal *Le Monde*, anywhere from 4,000 to 6,000 individuals converted from Islam to Christianity in Algeria. The numbers are not exact and one source said that the
number of converts from Islam to Christianity is a “state secret” (Madany 2010).

While these numbers are not overwhelming, they are significant. These individuals represent potentially hundreds of thousands of others who wait and watch and hunger to come fully to Christ and into fellowship with his church. Yet, as stated at the outset, the difficulties both intrinsic to Islam and Christianity as well as those challenges internal to the individual make conversion to Christ and connection with the church the very hardest thing that many Muslims could ever conceive of doing.

Adventist Frontier Missions (AFM) requested that I work on this document in order to better understand the major difficulties that Muslims face in conversion. The goal is to provide an instrument that outlines major barriers and common milestones in conversion for those coming out of Islam. It is my hope that the accompanying chart might help other Christian workers in identifying major challenges to spiritual progress among Muslim background believers (MBBs). While the indicators, the scale, and the conclusions drawn are not an attempt to measure the work of the Holy Spirit, it is my prayer these things will be a tool that may be helpful in determining spiritual orientation, understanding deeply the challenges faced by Muslims, developing deeper sympathy for MBBs, and formulating support structures and processes for Muslims as they make their very challenging journey from Islam to Christ and into the church.

**Defining Conversion**

What does conversion from Islam to Christianity look like? What does it mean when a Muslim accepts Christ as his Lord and Savior? Is it an intellectual acceptance of a few biblical teachings? Is it a sudden shift in allegiance from Mohammed to Christ? Understanding what accepting Jesus means for Muslims is essential to really empathizing with them amidst the challenges that work against them ever coming to him. A clearer comprehension of these challenges helps one appreciate also the ardent love for Christ that enables many to press through seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Finally, understanding what conversion means for the MBB helps one appreciate the good to be found in Islamic culture and to walk with those whose faith is leading them to make life-altering choices that will forever change their world.

Some have simply stated that conversion is saving faith in Christ (Engel 1990:184-185). Others have expanded on this simple definition to emphasize that saving faith in Christ results in a fundamental transformation in the life of the believer (Greenham 2004:34). This transformation involves a reorientation of all aspects of life as the new convert relates to
his world, his culture, and his environment in light of the Bible. One missiologist put it this way:

When we speak of conversion we refer to people who turn from other ways to become followers of God, who revealed Himself to us incarnate in Jesus Christ, as the Lord of our lives. Conversion is a turning around, a moving in a new direction. This turning may be sudden or slow; as humans we do not always know when it happens. God, who sees the heart, knows. Our calling is to invite people to follow Christ and to become His disciples. Moreover, once people have turned to Christ we need to encourage them to grow in the knowledge of the truth, in the love of God, and in holiness.

Conversion involves many transformations. On the social level, conversion involves changes in the way people relate to their families, friends, and community, and to other Christians. On the psychological level, it involves new ways of seeing and feeling about themselves, and integrating their new beliefs into their personal lives. On the cultural level, it involves a new way of living in the world. This affects all three dimensions of culture: On the cognitive level, it is a new way of viewing reality. On the affective level, it brings new love and joy. On the evaluative or moral level, it leads to a new understanding of righteousness and sin, and a desire to be holy. At the core of this cultural conversion is the transformation of worldviews. (Hiebert 2005:24)

Conversion is a personal transformation of the desires, motives, and life by the power of God (Greenham 2004:32, 33). This personal transformation should set an individual free from cultural patterns of thinking and living that are not in harmony with the Bible. However, this change does not happen overnight. It may take years for a Muslim to give up long cherished beliefs and attitudes that block him from understanding the truth about Christ and the Bible. Conversion for him may be the fruition of years of internal struggle. It is important to remember that the wooing of the Holy Spirit towards conversion to Christ should be active, dynamic, and progressive and may go on for years without any external sign. Islam does not teach that humans need a savior from sin. They only need the guidance of the prophets of which Mohammed is the seal. So, when Muslims begin to show genuine remorse for sin and a desire to be better people one can know they are under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. However, their remedy for this sense of unworthiness will most likely be a move to be stricter in their adherence to ritual prayer and possibly more violent in their reaction to any suggestion that there is any saving path outside of Islam. True conversion is not only remorse for sin and the past but it also leads to repentance of past ways and a change in attitude toward Christ and the gospel. While remorse may be a precursor
of conversion it should not be confounded with conversion itself (Greenham 2004:20, 21). Conversion implies a “turning and transformation” and seems to echo the conceptual framework of Hiebert. Transformation then implies a turning from old systems, concepts, and allegiances to the new concepts and principles of the gospel. A renewed mind leads to new allegiance (Rom 12:1-2).

**Transformation and Its Tangible Results**

Conversion to Christ from Islam will result in accessions to the church although such a prospect is pregnant with danger and difficulty. Those accessions may need to be carried out with the greatest discretion because in some Muslim settings death is the penalty for conversion. The notion of conversion as transformation is indelibly linked to church growth. In fact, in a very real sense it is through conversion of non-Christians that the church develops numerically (Tippett 1987:74). “Externally individuals have to be won from paganism or from materialism; internally each generation has to be brought face to face with Christ for itself. In each case there has to be a positive act of acceptance, submission and experience of faith” (74). When the life and worldview are changed it is only natural for MBBs to search to join in worship with those who share the same faith as they do. That is why the role of the church in missions to Muslims cannot be diminished (Nikkides 2006:7, 8). Granted, this role is substantively dissimilar to what it would be in other settings and may be much more undercover; however, the church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men and women.

**A Process or a Point in Time**

At first glance scriptural evidence seems to suggest that people come to Christ at a specific point in time, in a moment. The stories of the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Philippian jailer, and the soldier at the cross all seem to support this idea. This does happen but a closer study of the Bible suggests that even sudden conversions are the result of a long process. The most common manner of conversion for those with little or no prior exposure to Christ or Christianity is that of coming to faith gradually. This is especially true for Muslims. In fact, Greenham has eloquently emphasized the fact that for Muslims conversion is often lengthy as they struggle against many barriers and ideas that interfere with a biblical understanding of Christ (Greenham 2004:29, 30). Ellen White clearly links a long process of wooing by the Spirit to what some may call “sudden conversion.”

The wind is heard among the branches of the trees, rustling the leaves and flowers; yet it is invisible, and no man knows whence it comes or
whither it goes. So with the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. It can no more be explained than can the movements of the wind. A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ. These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the word from the living preacher. Suddenly, as the Spirit comes with more direct appeal, the soul gladly surrenders itself to Jesus. By many this is called sudden conversion; but it is the result of long wooing by the Spirit of God,—a patient, protracted process. (White 1940:172)

In recognition of the gradual nature in the conversion of individuals from outside of Christianity, James Engel developed a scale that delineates the movement from a state of unawareness of Christ to spiritual maturity. In the development of this process he identifies eight aspects of the conversion/decision making process:

1. The decision/conversion process does not stop with acceptance of Christ but continues as the convert matures in faith and moves toward God’s people.

2. Decision is the result of a felt need met or a change in life which engenders receptivity to the gospel. Receptivity is based at least in part on the following.
   a. A concept of a living God who loves and who is knowable.
   b. Grasp of what it means to be a sinner and awareness of personal sin.
   c. Some understanding of the unique saving role of Jesus Christ.
   d. Awareness of becoming a Christian through repentance and faith.

3. A valid conversion is predicated on at least an elementary knowledge of the gospel.

4. According to Engel, the starting point of saving knowledge lies in general revelation and thus is accessible to all. This would seem to be one of the Apostle Paul’s emphases in Romans 1.

5. Even though people cannot grasp (in their natural state) spiritual truth, the Holy Spirit undertakes the work of conviction and provides insight into the nature of God.

6. People move gradually toward salvation as they become aware of the gospel and its implications.

7. Gospel truth is not effective until the recipient understands its implications in the context of life goals, felt needs, and basic motivations.

8. There is a change of allegiance that takes place through repentance and faith motivated by the Holy Spirit. (Engel 1990:187)
Engel’s Conversion Scale

In Engel’s assessment, “the act of turning is secondary to the process itself” (Engel 1990:185). The visible act of turning to Christ is a point along a continuum of accepting Christ as one’s personal Savior that continues on through discipleship and worldview transformation. Conversion to Christ for Muslims is the result of many barriers overcome and is often a long process. It is also a starting point to complete worldview transformation that should end in association with the church of Christ. Engel arrives at a conclusion near the end of his treatise that is vital to effective ministry to Muslims who are in the process of coming to Christ.

He suggests that most people in most situations are at the very early stages of the decision process and cannot be reached with traditional evangelistic strategies presenting a truncated plan of salvation and calling for decision. How can people understand Jesus Christ and accept him when they possess only a fragmentary knowledge at best of basic gospel truths? The seed must be sown before it can be reaped. Nonetheless, the most evangelistic efforts ignore this basic fact and proceed as if God will bring about some miraculous understanding of the message (188, 189).

The implications of this statement are far reaching and are suggestive in some measure of the patience and investment of time and resources required for Christians to effectively win Muslims to Christ. Greenham also emphasizes another unique aspect of Muslim conversion to Christ.

Few come to Christ because they reject their religion. The evidence suggests that rejection occurs independently, or subsequent to converts’ encounters with Jesus. Major conversion patterns discerned by the author do not show Muslims turning to Christ because they believe Islam is wrong. Accordingly, missionaries desiring to see converts should not attack Islam but should concentrate on pointing Muslims to Jesus instead. (Greenham 2004:233)

Worldview Transformation and Conversion

Dale Goodson, AFM researcher and pioneer missionary, has done some groundbreaking work on conversion and the change of allegiance that is the fruit of worldview transformation. An individual’s original worldview, based on a set of culturally conditioned principles, provides a closed system that effectively answers life’s questions and provides structure and order to one’s world. In times of crisis or need, or when the individual is exposed to other philosophies the holes and weaknesses of his own worldview become apparent. This leads to questioning and at least some receptivity to the gospel.

The gospel challenges old worldview assumptions and presents other
explanations of life experience based on biblical principles in the context of the Great Controversy. A convert’s change to a new allegiance is often the result of intense inner struggles with old worldview assumptions and a protracted exposure to and study of the gospel.

**A PARADIGM FOR WORLDVIEW TRANSFORMATION**

![Goodson's worldview transformation diagram.](image)

**The Devotional Aspect of Conversion**

Ellen White emphasizes the internal, devotional aspect of transformation that is a consequence of conversion to Christ. The following statement would seem to indicate that even for Muslims, conversion must be more than an intellectual assent to the truthfulness of Bible teaching and an intellectual assent to the divinity and Lordship of Jesus.

Conversion is a work that most do not appreciate. It is not a small matter to transform an earthly, sin-loving mind and bring it to understand the unspeakable love of Christ, the charms of His grace, and the excellency of God, so that the soul shall be imbued with divine love and captivated with the heavenly mysteries. When he understands
these things, his former life appears disgusting and hateful. He hates sin, and, breaking his heart before God, he embraces Christ as the life and joy of the soul. He renounces his former pleasures. He has a new mind, new affections, new interest, new will; his sorrows, and desires, and love are all new. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, which have heretofore been preferred before Christ, are now turned from, and Christ is the charm of his life, the crown of his rejoicing. Heaven, which once possessed no charms, is now viewed in its riches and glory; and he contemplates it as his future home, where he shall see, love, and praise the One who hath redeemed him by His precious blood.

The works of holiness, which appeared wearisome, are now his delight. The word of God, which was dull and uninteresting, is now chosen as his study, the man of his counsel. It is as a letter written to him from God, bearing the inscription of the Eternal. His thoughts, his words, and his deeds are brought to this rule and tested. He trembles at the commands and threatenings which it contains, while he firmly grasps its promises and strengthens his soul by appropriating them to himself. The society of the most godly is now chosen by him, and the wicked, whose company he once loved, he no longer delights in. He weeps over those sins in them at which he once laughed. Self-love and vanity are renounced, and he lives unto God, and is rich in good works. This is the sanctification which God requires. Nothing short of this will He accept. (White 1948:294)

Factors in Conversion to Christianity

A number of factors have been identified as pivotal in Muslim conversion to Christ. What is striking is the relative consistency of these factors across the Muslim world. These will only be touched upon briefly because later sections of this article more fully treat the major factors in Muslim conversion to Christ. The most frequent and prominent factors are dreams, life crisis, exposure to the Scriptures, a loving Christian, finding answers to unanswered questions, and attraction to the picture of Christ traced in the pages of the Bible.

Towards the Development of the E-Scale

As Heibert has indicated, what some may call conversion is actually a cluster of several transformations. These transformations are social, theological, ideological, and cultural. The following sections outline in greater detail the major aspects of these areas of transformation as they relate to the Muslim convert. Necessarily, the barriers and bridges inherent to spiritual progress are identified.

The final section is the culmination of this document and presents the basic Muslim faith continuum tool and some related explanations, final
notes, and recommendations for further study. The continuum tracks closely with the observations of Engel for the conversion of non-Christians and takes into consideration the aspects of transformation highlighted by Hiebert.

**Cognitive—Cultural Barriers and Milestones in Muslim Spiritual Progress**

It is possible to make a list of the worldview cognitive and philosophical aspects of a Muslim worldview and the potential cognitive barriers to conversion associated with them. However, at the foundation of this list would essentially be one or two core values that lie at the heart of the Muslim worldview. These are the honor/shame paradigm and its allied value of social solidarity.

There is much to admire about Islamic society in general and the honor/shame motif specifically. The attention to modesty and moderation of many Muslim societies is a standing rebuke to the excesses and materialism of the “Christian” West. The centrality of the family as the building block of the social order serves as a reminder of the biblical ideal for society. Teaching children that their actions bring either honor or dishonor to the family is a powerful influence in regulating the actions of the young. These are all admirable traits that the West for the most part seems to have lost. Yet, these very ties and the social order can also serve to repress people from investigating the gospel.

The goal of this section on the psychological-cultural aspect of conversion is threefold. The first objective is to demonstrate the need to understand the depth of an honor/shame based worldview and how dissimilar it is to a Western worldview and where it aligns with and deviates from a biblical worldview. Second, this section aims to show that the honor motif is a major factor that has many implications for Muslims who would convert to Christianity. Third, I attempt to demonstrate the uniqueness of the honor/shame concept in Islamic societies and how maintaining the social order becomes a tool that discourages conversion to Christ. In Muslim societies honor is defined as the public recognition of one’s social standing. This honor-based social standing can be either ascribed (inherited) through lineage or conferred (acquired) through noble deeds. Honor is paramount to the family and integral to every part of society. Its value to the family is in its public recognition and subsequent respect and social standing that it confers (Moxnes 1993:168).

This motif of honor and shame plays out in every domain of life. In social conflicts, in the family lineage, in culturally coded competition and displays of masculinity, in gender roles, in dress and modesty of women,
and in dominance of one family group over another this quest for honor is fundamental to social standing (168).

Morality, Shame, and the Community

Several scholars have shown that in honor/shame societies right and wrong are measured less by adherence to laws or principles and more by what brings honor or shame to the family, the community, and the society. The following tables that have been reproduced in several studies shows how people belonging to highly socialized honor/shame societies like those that are Islamic measure culpability in comparison to the Western model of guilt-based culpability.

Table 1. Guilt-Based Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I Believe I Am Guilty</th>
<th>Others Believe I Am Guilty</th>
<th>I should/will feel guilty regardless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am guilty and I am punished</td>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I protest my innocence and fight the accusation</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I Believe I Am Guilty</th>
<th>Others Believe I Am Guilty</th>
<th>No problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am guilty and I am punished</td>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I protest my innocence and fight the accusation</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is obvious from this graphic is that the group determines the morality of the individual. In Islam this group morality is more than just the setting of social norms and cultural taboos. The group serves as the voice of conscience in many respects.

The Qur'an teaches that obeying one's parents is second only to obey-
ing God (see sura 31:14; 46:15; 6:151; 17:23-24). This concept is also reinforced by many hadith that command respect to one’s parents—especially to one’s mother. Children are taught from their earliest days that family dignity and honor is to be preserved. One of the greatest ways of doing this is to preserve the honor of the women of the home—especially unmarried daughters. Preserving the virginity of unmarried girls and controlling them is one of the chief marks of honor in a family and becomes the duty for the father and brothers to maintain (Binghalib 2007:11).

Collectivist Society

Islam presents a highly communal honor/shame society that is closed and has highly developed methods of social control to ensure cultural continuity. This sets Islam apart from almost every other society in the world, both modern and ancient. It is also a major reason that conversion out of Islam proves so difficult. One author and social commentator makes the very interesting observation that the Muslim social system and marital practices reinforce “in-group solidarity” not observable in any other major community in the world. He says:

Yet the very strong form of endogamy uniquely practiced throughout much of the Muslim world shows that it is possible to construct human society on the basis of another fundamental strategy. Instead of cultural communication, adaptive development, and mutual trust, this strategy stresses intense in-group solidarity and unbreakable cultural continuity. (Kurtz 2007)

The thesis of his article is that parallel cousin marriage—still widely practiced uniquely in Islamic communities—is both highly indicative of, and extremely vital to continued in-group solidarity. He further states:

Holy argues that the high value placed on endogamy sharply sets Muslim society apart from the rest of the world. The loyalties of women who marry within their own family lines remain undivided. Negatively, therefore, parallel cousin marriage sacrifices the “integrative” advantages of exogamy. Yet in a positive sense, parallel cousin marriage serves as a powerful tool for preserving the internal solidarity and cultural continuity of the group. (Kurtz 2007)

After hastening to indicate that “no real society is, or can be, entirely composed of sealed-off, perpetually in-marrying family lines” (Kurtz 2007), and confirming that many Muslims do marry outside of the family line, do form alliances, and do seek cultural and economic exchange he arrives at the principle he is seeking to illustrate. “Muslim society’s lead-
ing theme is set and reinforced by the preference for parallel-cousin marriage—*that theme being the creation of closed off, secluded, and intensely loyal “solidarities,”* and harsh dealing with any insider who would endanger or desert the charmed circle*” (Kurtz 2007, emphasis supplied).

The honor/shame motif and its connection with in-group solidarity was also developed by Kurtz when he observed that “Holy showed how cousin marriage serves as a fail-safe protective device to secure *collective family honor,* and linked the honor-based function of cousin marriage to a broader appreciation of super-charged in-group solidarity (Kurtz 2007, emphasis supplied).

**Religion and Solidarity**

When Mohammed was first preaching Islam and he and his followers were still a small and persecuted sect he bound them together ingeniously through inculcating in them that the ties of the *Ummah* were higher than the clan-based and tribal alliances of pagan Arabia. What unified them was the call of Allah to Islam. Later as Islam developed in Medina he let Muslims know that they were God’s chosen people. In fact, his reminder to the people that they were the best of all people in effect replaces the concept of the called out so often referenced in the Bible. “You are now the best people brought forth for (the guidance and reform of) mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. Had the People of the Book believed it were better for them. Some of them are believers but most of them are transgressors” (Sura 3:110).

As Islam developed, the *Ummah* became sufficiently large and many of the cultural practices and other solidarity-preserving mechanisms of Arabia were re-integrated back into the religion. Whether this solidarity as enforced in Islam is the result of religious principles or the result of an extension and accentuation of ancient Arabian values is less important than its effect on its adherents. The effect is that religion has proven to reinforce and solidify the honor/shame and solidarity motifs inherent in Mediterranean cultures and make preserving uniformity a religious duty.

There is certainly much to be admired about shame/honor-based morality in the Muslim family and clan-based societies. Respect for hierarchy and ascribed honor, communal loyalty to those deserving of respect, intense loyalty to the group, a social network and support structure that is duty-bound to do the honorable thing, and an aversion to bringing shame on the family are all laudable virtues.

Yet, many of these very strengths militate against the individual search-er having the freedom to explore the love of God through Christ in the Bible. The strong aversion to shame makes families react very harshly to those who are perceived as breaking group solidarity through conversion.
This same aversion to bringing shame on the family discourages many young seekers from declaring for Christ.

Is it possible to preserve the laudable aspects of the shame-based culture of Islam for potential converts and yet free them to explore Christ and his truth as revealed in the Bible? Though this is a delicate and challenging task, I believe that it is possible.

**Toward a Cognitive, Psychological Scale of Muslim Progress**

As Muslims come to Christ there is often a great struggle with this honor/shame paradigm and unwillingness to bring shame on one’s family. They should be carefully taught that the shame that they may endure as a convert is pre-requisite to greater honor that God will bestow upon all of his faithful children. They should be taught to pray for and stay connected to their family as far as possible. They should not be resentful at the anger or hatred they may experience. They should be pointed to Jesus who endured a shameful death on the cross—the most shameful death known at that time. Yet such shame was prerequisite to higher honor (Phil 2:1-5; Heb 1 and 2).

The following are concepts that the individual must deal with in the light of the Bible and with the support of other believers.

1. The highest and most honorable thing that one can do is to obey God.
2. Being a follower of Christ means that one is willing to endure shame.
3. The Bible is full of the honor/shame motif.
4. Every child is obligated to honor the wishes of his family where these do not conflict with God’s revealed will. When disobeying the wishes of the family because of allegiance to God this causes great internal pain for all involved. Jesus will support through that pain.
5. Every believer should seek a meek and quiet spirit; this is honorable before God.
6. Often humiliation and shame precede greater honor. Jesus received greater honor after his deep humiliation.
7. Jesus embraced shame as honorable if that shame was ordained by God and was in the path of duty.

**Supporting Converts in Their Worldview/Cognitive Progress**

1. Finding the right balance will be a difficult challenge at the beginning. One convert who is now a pastor told me that he went directly to his family and told them that he was now a Christian and that their faith was wrong. He was thrown out of the home that very day. The lack of tact may have been a function of fear or an attempt to steel himself against the
opposition he knew was coming from his family.

2. Constantly pointing converts to Jesus will help them find their equilibrium as they seek to attain a new identity that allows them to stay as connected as possible to their people yet allows them the freedom to grow in Christ.

3. Even if new converts are rejected they must be made to understand that they must still honor their family.

4. Emphasize the honor/shame motif in the writings of Paul. Philippians 2:1-5 emphasizes that Jesus gained honor by accepting shame.

5. Affirm that it is an honor for you the local church leader to stand with the new convert during the process of coming to Christ.

**Doctrinal/Theological Milestones**

Islamic doctrine presents several inherent challenges for the conversion of its adherents to Christianity. It would also seem that Islamic teaching has several advantages especially suited to Seventh-day Adventists. There are three levels of the doctrinal issues that present barriers to faith in Christ. The primary level belief barriers and milestones are related to concepts that are fundamental to Christian faith and that the Bible deems as salvation issues but which are problematic in Islamic doctrine. The secondary level doctrinal belief barriers and milestones are concepts that are fundamental to Islamic theology and generally understood to be in opposition to the Bible but not of primary importance. The tertiary level milestone issues present Qur'anic or Islamic worldview issues that must be reinterpreted or discarded as part of the continuing process of spiritual maturity. These may or may not be considered basic salvation issues but prolonged adherence to them may incite syncretism and arrest spiritual growth. The bridge beliefs tend to be similar at least thematically between Islam and Christianity on a surface level. These are the starting points for most interaction, evangelism, or comparative studies. The more fully such issues are delved into, the greater the divergence between the biblical worldview and that of the Qur'an. There is, however, ample potential for the establishment of a bridge into Bible truth through starting with Qur'anic concepts and common Muslim themes that are similar to biblical themes. A list of bridge theological concepts and short descriptions are included.

Although some specific beliefs may be briefly mentioned, the emphasis is on a broad conceptual framework and not specific doctrines. Just as worldview is a byproduct of culture, so doctrine, to a large extent, is a byproduct of religious worldview assumptions.
Primary Belief Barriers and Milestones

Jesus Christ

1. The person of Jesus is listed first as both a barrier and a bridge. The concept of Jesus as the Son of God is for historical and theological reasons revolting to a faithful Muslim. Some of the strongest statements in the Qur’an have to do with this doctrine. The Qur’an unequivocally states that God has no Son (Sura 4:171; 19:29; 19:88; 17:111; 10:68; and 43:81 are all very clear pronouncements to that effect. Yet, Muslims in general maintain a strong attraction to Christ. A fascinating component of Muslims coming to faith in Christ is the comparative role the Qur’an and the Bible played in the conversion of a set of Palestinian converts. In that study 72 percent of Palestinian Sunni Muslim women who converted to Christ said they first started to think seriously about Christ after reading the Qur’an while only 27 percent of all men had the same experience. Conversely, 87 percent of all men and women said that they were converted after reading about Christ in the Bible (Greenham 2004:184). This would seem to suggest that even the incomplete picture of Jesus as traced in the pages of the Qur’an does whet the appetite of Muslims to know more. It is the more complete picture of Christ in the Bible that seems to captivate and lead to conversion.

2. Christ as the Messiah is a concept that shares the same terminology in both the Qur’an and the Bible but based on very different conceptual frameworks. The challenge for Muslims lies in unlearning Qur’anic concepts and learning biblical ones.

3. Jesus is a Muslim in the Qur’an. Again, some may point out that the word Muslim means surrendered. This is true but again the term comes with a set of historical and worldview presuppositions that prove disadvantageous to a correct understanding of who Christ is. For this reason the application of the Qur’anic ideal of Jesus as a Muslim is considered a barrier.

The Muslim Concept of Sin

1. Some reference is made in the Qur’an to sin—usually in the form of prohibitions—and in some sense it does resemble the biblical concept; however, one point where the Qur’anic concept diverges from the biblical concept is in the area of accountability. In the Bible sin is transgression of the law (the Ten Commandments) and human beings are accountable to God. Sin’s dire consequences to God, to heaven, the universe, the world, nations, God’s chosen people, and to individuals are spelled out in the unfolding biblical history of the Great Controversy. Islam has no overarching Great Controversy theme. In the Qur’an sin is often referred to in the
context of that which angers God and his prophet. The implications of this
difference are far-reaching.

2. Sin is considered to be the result of man’s lack of right guidance and
is easily remedied by the guidance provided in the Qur’an through the
prophet. There is no deep sense of the sinfulness of human nature or the
need of a Savior.

The Character of God

1. In Muslim ideology God is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.
He adds to these universal qualities an aloofness that does not permit him to
become overly involved in human affairs. He is beyond understanding
and knowing. One must only surrender to him in submission and he will
be merciful. The way that he helps humans is by sending them prophets
who guide them. This belief is placed in the primary barrier list because
of the impression of God as aloof and uncaring that many Muslims have.

2. God is not seen as One who pursues sinful humans. In fact, the concept
of a God that actually seeks the lost, takes risks to save the one lost sheep,
waits anxiously for the return of the prodigal, turns the house upside
down to search for the lost coin, or stoops to defend a women caught in
adultery is foreign to Islam. God is, in fact, unapproachable and the one
way to approach him is through submission and the five daily prayers.
The five daily prayers are an end in themselves. They have more of a sac-
ramental role than a functional role. They serve to satisfy the requirements
of God but do not always serve to draw a seeker closer to God.

The following are some Qur’anic pronouncements about God’s atti-
dute toward willful sinners: “Allah loves not transgressors” (2:190); “He
loves not creatures ungrateful or wicked” (2:276); “Say: ‘Obey Allah and
His Apostle;’ but if they turn back Allah loves not those who reject Faith”
(3:32); “Allah loves not those who do wrong” (3:57, 140); “Allah loves not
the arrogant, the vainglorious” (4:36); and “Say, if ye love Allah, follow
me; Allah will love and forgive you your sins” (3:31).

The Atonement and the Propitiatory Death of Christ

The atonement and the propitiatory death of Christ on the cross
are strongly resisted in modern orthodox Muslim theology. It seems of little
use to dispute with Muslims whether the Qur’an really denies the death of
Christ on the cross or not. In orthodox Islamic theology the Qur’an denies
it. The implicitness or explicitness of the denial is secondary to the denial
itself. In Sura 4:157-158, Mohammed defends the honor of God’s proph-
et Jesus by suggesting that the Jews were tricked into thinking that they
crucified Christ when it was really someone else. Many Muslim scholars
suggest that it was Judas who was really crucified. The worldview issue
behind this text is the very high cultural esteem for prophets and a denial that God would let his great prophet suffer so ignominiously.

Secondary Belief Barriers

There is a larger set of Islamic beliefs that often prove challenging to the Muslim who is coming to faith in Christ but which may be less difficult to overcome than the tier one barriers.

Attitudes Towards the Bible

Muslim attitudes towards the Bible are a major secondary belief barrier because Muslims are taught that the Bible has been corrupted. Some refuse to touch it for fear of exposure to its errors. Yet, the Bible has proven to be the single most effective tool leading to Muslim conversions to Christ (Maranz 2006:61). Whether it be comparative studies of the Bible and the Qur’an, qur’anic affirmations of the validity of the Bible, qur’anic passages referring to Jesus that leave one longing for a fuller understanding, doubts about Islam, or crisis experiences that lead one to read the Bible, an extremely high percentage of converts to Christianity from Islam say that one of the most instrumental factors was a personal reading of the Bible in which they heard the voice of God (Greenham 2004:228).

Rejection of the Trinity

Understanding that Christ is the Son of God and that the Holy Spirit is not the angel Gabriel is a theological-philosophical challenge for Muslims coming to faith in Christ (Sura 4:171; and 5:73). Shirk or blasphemy are also often aligned with the Muslim belief in the oneness of God. Shirk is the sin of ascribing partners to God. It is polytheism and is unforgivable. Also included under this general heading is the prohibition to convert out of Islam.

General Beliefs about Salvation

Salvation in Islam is achieved by submitting to the will of Allah and living a good life. It is a works oriented religion.

Belief about Islam

Muslims believe that the Qur’an is later revelation that supersedes and corrects errors in the Bible. The Qur’an and Islam are the source of all certainty.

Fatalism

Most Muslim cultures are fatalistic, believing that all that is exists be-
cause it is God’s will. God sees and knows all and knows how things will come to pass. There is a constant tension in Muslim life between accepting what is Allah’s will and the desire to manipulate outcomes. As a high
religion\textsuperscript{6} Islam often fails to meet the tangible and real needs and fears of its adherents. Thus syncretism, charms, and talismans are extremely common all across the Muslim world from the Middle East to the Orient and Africa.

**Qur’anic Animism**

Many scholars cite a large share of Arabian folk belief in the Qur’an that has become incorporated into Islamic practice. As an example of one such holdover from pre-Islamic Arabian belief is that of the *jinn*, which play a significant role in the Qur’an. Jinn are spirit beings made of fire that are neither angels nor demons and can be good or mischievous. They often trick and torment those who will be lost. The *jinn* existed in pre-Islamic, polytheistic Arabia and are one example of pre-Islamic beliefs that Mohammed incorporated into the Qur’an. The *jinn* in some respects resemble the territorial spirits of other purely animistic societies. Reference is made to King Solomon’s command of the *jinn* who dove (into the ocean perhaps?) for him (Sura 21:81-82) and who did other menial work. *Jinn* are also said to have stolen the throne of the Queen of Sheba for him (Sura 27:38-40). Reference could also be made to Sura 34:12-14 where these spirit beings help Solomon in his grand construction projects. Most Muslims practice several forms of animistic practices as a means of protection against the *jinn* and many Muslim societies have a set of folklore built upon this subject.

**Tertiary Belief Barriers**

**Folk Islam**

Aside from Qur’anic animism there is in every Islamic society an underlying folk religious system that remains largely undisturbed by Islam and is syncretistically mixed with it. What distinguishes this folk religion from Qur’anic animism is the local nature of the religious syncretism as opposed to broad animistic principles generalized by the teaching of the Qur’an. Yemen is one of the strictest Muslim societies where much of the population practices protectionism through talismans. The *kitab*, a small ornate vessel or box suspended on a leather string and worn on the body, often contains Qur’anic verses or other charms for protection. The use of the *kitab* has spread from the Arabian Peninsula and is practiced by the nomadic Tuareg of the Sahara and other Muslim tribes.
The Higher Way Syndrome

According to Islam, earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus brought truth from God, but over time their followers corrupted God’s true intent. Mohammed came to correct those perversions. Therefore, the Bible has been corrupted and is no longer reliable (Cable 2011).

The Final Word

Muslims believe that Mohammed is the last of the prophets; there can be no further revelation. Questioning the meaning of the Qur’an as held by the local Imam is strictly prohibited (Cable 2011).

The Greater Reward

Zeal and strict adherence to the tenets of Islam will result in great rewards in paradise. Zealous Muslims will be proselytizing others, not allowing someone to try to convert them (Cable 2011).

Thematic Bridges and Cultural Holes

Islamic theology presents a number of thematic elements and cultural holes that provide perfect bridges between the Qur’an and the Bible as a starting point to deeper ministry. The length of this document will only allow an outline of thematic elements and areas of similarity between Seventh-day Adventist biblical understanding and Muslim elements or beliefs. Cultural holes are those areas of existence where Islam inadequately addresses situations, thereby leaving a void in the spiritual lives of its adherents. Only the most prominent of these will be highlighted.

The following presents the major doctrinal themes of Islam and suggested thematic bridges for Bible study. They are arranged under thematic headings of the five or six major beliefs of Islam with the addition of one or two supplemental headings.

The Doctrine of God (Allah)

This group of thematic bridges is centered on the creation story. All throughout these topics the majesty, power, love, and other attributes of God are taught as they are revealed in and through creation. They include (1) God the Creator; (2) God as all powerful; (3) God as full of love that is first introduced at the fall when the plan of salvation was revealed (Gen 3:15), and includes a conceptual introduction into humanity’s need for salvation; (4) God and his law—a first introduction to the Ten Commandments; (5) God the Savior and the presentation of the plan of salvation from God’s point of view that can reinforce the salvation concept through
OT illustrations without yet referring to Christ the Savior, especially in the initial presentations; and (6) God calls you, and God’s desire for you is for you to make a decision to truly surrender to God.

The Doctrine of Angels

This group of studies deals with several common Bible topics that are also areas of keen interest for Muslims. The studies are based on the interaction of angels in the life of Jacob and other OT characters common to Islam. They also touch on some of the dynamics of the OT patriarchal families and their struggles throughout their lives. The studies should deal with (1) the nature of angels, (2) the ministry of angels, (3) an angel in rebellion—the beginning of the Great Controversy and the fall of Lucifer with a contrast of the Qur’anic narrative of the fall of Satan that is different from the biblical story and which does prepare Muslims to hear about the biblical perspective of Lucifer’s rebellion and fall, and (4) angels and the judgment.

The Last Days

This set of bridges finds its context in the days leading up to the flood and the momentous events surrounding the building of the ark that included God’s plan to save the world. The stories should include the twelve signs of the last days where the Bible is much more explicit than the Qur’an about the condition of the world. The theme of the last days is a common Qur’anic motif so many Muslims have a fascination with this topic. There should also be presentations on God’s people in the last days, characteristics of God’s faithful people, and a description of false believers in the last days.

The Judgment

This set of thematic bridges is based upon the stories of God’s judgment on ancient Egypt during the time of Moses and God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah during the time of Abraham. The studies should include (1) the reason for the judgment, (2) the reach of the judgment and its nature, (3) the judgment and the righteous as introduced in Daniel 9, (4) prophets and their prophecies concerning judgment, (5) ancient prophets of God including an introduction to Bible predictions and prophecy that builds upon the Qur’anic concept of prophets, (6) prophets and the last days, (7) prophecies about the Messiah, and (8) the messages of God’s prophets.
Health

This set of conceptual bridges is supported by the story of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1 and their refusal to eat unclean and unhealthful food. Devout Muslims are very conscientious about a few basic health laws with which Adventists can wholeheartedly agree. The studies should include (1) the lifestyle of a true believer including an introduction to godly living, (2) food and drink—God’s hatred of alcohol, unclean meat, and other unhealthful practices, (3) God’s care and concern for your health, and (4) the Ten Commandments and your health.

Good and Evil

This set of bridge subjects finds its context in the story of King Saul and the witch of Endor. The studies should include (1) how to protect against evil and where evil comes from; (2) where are the spirits of the dead? (3) magic, sorcery, and curses; (4) evil spirits; and (5) talking to the dead.

Social Factors and Their Implications in Conversion of Muslims to Christ

We sat in a woman’s living room. The elder of the only Seventh-day Adventist church group in the country and I had carefully arranged this visit. We were speaking politely with her father whom she had brought from the interior of the country. That time of year was very hot in the desert so she brought him from the village to stay in her home in this sprawling seaside city. The conversation was pleasant during which the elderly gentleman constantly praised Allah. We talked for some time until the daughter, a thirty-something aged lady asked him politely to give us some time to speak privately. We talked carefully; ready to change back to more casual conversation if the father were to meander back into the room. This brave soul told us how her family knew that she had accepted Christ but did not know that she was discreetly attending church on a regular basis. We spoke about how the fledging little church group in the country—at that time only ten people—could lend her support and how we could supply her with Bible study materials. She told us of a group of Muslim women in need of Bible lessons. They were all secretly studying about Christ and wanted more information from the Bible. The elder and I left that home touched by the dedication of this lady in spite of danger and against great odds in her continued adherence to the Bible and the Christ that she loves.

This true account has provided me with much food for thought. In thinking of our interview with that lady and the barriers that exist to her open expression of faith and the limitations of the church group’s ability
to openly minister to her, it becomes immediately obvious that many of the greatest barriers to conversion to Christ are social. Islam is a religious system that is so intimately linked with the social structures in their various expressions that differentiating between the two becomes at times almost impossible.

This section examines the social aspects and implications of conversion from Islam to Christianity. It underlines the very real dangers and practical problems encountered by MBBs in their process of conversion. It also examines the social factors that may actually lead to conversion out of the Islamic system and into Christianity. While this subject presents many stark numbers and daunting challenges the news is not all bad. There are actually miraculous things happening in the realm of the social in the lives of MBBs. This article examines the most prominent of these. The social progress scale is introduced and then the article discusses the case of the Masahiyoon of the African Maghreb and their allegiance to Christ, adherence to the church, and the fact that for the most part they have stayed connected to their culture albeit with great difficulty. The implications offer promise for the future and yet a sober reminder of the difficulties facing those who convert out of Islam. Finally, this paper discusses the implications for the church in approaching and dealing with the social context of converts, both pre and post conversion.

Social Factors in Conversion

A fascinating study was undertaken by Edward Evans of 70 individuals who came to faith in Christ and converted out of Islam in Pakistan. The following is a summary of the findings of that study and also of another group of converts from Central Asia, especially as they relate to the social factors involved in coming to faith in Christ (Evans 2005:167-186).

Conversions Tend Not to be in Groups

In Pakistan, there is no known record of conversions of blocks of people in significant numbers. The usual nature of conversion in this strict Muslim society is individual. This is only half of the story, however, because for many of these people there were family members who followed them later. This underlines one very important revelation of this study. In Pakistan and across the Muslim world, except maybe in the very strictest of settings, the separation from one’s family that follows after conversion is often temporary. A significant number of the 70 individuals had enough contact with their old social circles to win others to Christ.

Gender as a Factor in Conversion

The study revealed that only 10% of the converts were women. There
are several reasons for this; among the most prominent are the following:

1. Women have less social latitude to think independently of the group and it is physically harder for them to move about and meet Christians or even have exposure to the gospel in any form (Evans 2005:171).

2. Further evidence of this was demonstrated by the fact that although the overwhelming percentage of primary converts (90%) was male, secondary converts among women greatly increased. What this suggested was that women have a significantly easier time converting to Christianity when a husband, father, or brother first converts to Christianity (Evans 2005:181-82).

Socio-Economic Status as a Factor in Conversion

Another groundbreaking study of Muslims who converted to Christ and Christianity in Central Asia revealed another set of social factors that seem to be significant in conversion to Christianity (Abdulahugli 2005:157-66).

1. In the Central Asian context a full 65 to 70% of MBBs are either in villages or have relocated to the city from villages. This seems to be a contrast with other Muslim regions where most coverts come from the city. In the central Asian context 60% of converts had no profession and of them the majority was unemployed. These numbers would seem to indicate that many among this class may feel that Islam may not be meeting them at the level of their most basic daily needs (Abdulahugli 2005:161).

2. In the Central Asian study 80% of all converts are between the ages of 18 and 40. Many of them had lived life under the Soviet Union and were disappointed with life after independence when there was greater freedom for Islamic religious values to guide and influence everyday life (Abdulahugli 2005:161).

3. As in most of the Muslim world, fully 70% of converts that were of the lower socio-economic class did not know the Qur’an. This trend is widespread in the Muslim world. Most Muslims are poor and unable to read, and even if they are able to read, most do not understand the Arabic language or the Qur’an (Abdulahugli 2005:161).

4. Most (75%) of these converts had never practiced the five pillars of Islam (Abdulahugli 2005:161-62).

Family Relations as a Factor in Conversion

1. Of the converts studied in Central Asia, 96% had a family member that had already converted (Abdulahugli 2005:164).

2. Most (65%) were not dissuaded from conversion even though they could identify someone in their family as a strong religious Muslim. This
finding would tend to refute the assertion that Muslim converts to Christianity come from marginally faithful Muslim families or contexts.

3. More than half (55%) of converts said that they were led to faith in part through social contacts (22% were attracted by the changed life of a friend, 18% were attracted by the difference in the lives of believers, 15% were attracted by the changed life of a spouse Abdulahugli 2005:162).

4. A number of Palestinian converts said that they were actually encouraged to consider converting to Christ by community, family members, or friends that had already done so (Greenham 2004:228-233).

5. A large percentage of Palestinian converts surveyed said that believers present in their lives played a major role in their conversion. Some could identify only one person while others could identify several. The significance seems to be great across genders as well with no significant drop off from men to women (Greenham 2004:228).

External Social Factors in Conversion

1. All of the individuals studied testified that they were not offered money as an incentive to conversion (Abdulahugli 2005:165).

2. Exposure to Christian media was found to be a lesser but significant factor in the cases of several Palestinian converts (Greenham 2004:214).

The Social Implications of Conversion

Some of the greatest barriers within the Islamic system to conversion to Christianity find their strength in the social consequences that accrue to the person who risks moving outside of Islam. The theological aspects of this decision, though discussed in detail in another section, must be recognized as inextricably linked to the social implications.

Individual identity in almost all Muslim subcultures is determined by social group realities. Emanating from its Semitic roots is a social structure based on collective or community values. “Arab society [and by extension many Muslim societies] is not as concerned with rights or interests of the individual as it is with the welfare and good of society as a whole” (Baker 2003:9-20). The extended unit of the family provides for and is the social structure for the individual and it is built upon Islamic principles (Greenham 2004:112-113). The extended family or clan serves at once as the bank loan guarantor and many times the loan provider, the insurance network that comes and supports an individual in times of crisis, the first line of legal defense, the guarantor of marriages, and the planner of young people’s futures. Any deviation from tightly defined family and societal roles brings crisis. Swift, often initially severe reaction is the result. However, studies indicate that although conversion does bring disruption and shock to the social order that many people do re-establish relationships
with their families after a time and may even be accepted back into a limited role.

A Growing Trend

Despite the fact that there are a great many dangers associated with conversion to Christ, there has been a steady stream of them especially in the Arab countries of North Africa (Madany 2010). These coverts are known locally as the Masahiyoon and have associated with the church and largely stayed connected to their families (Madany 2010). This course however has a cost. Following is listed a range of danger that often results from conversion to Christ and out of the mosque.

The Dangers That Exist for Muslim Converts

Before moving on to study in greater detail the trends and numbers from the three major studies reviewed in this section, the insertion of a text from one of them underlining the very real social dangers faced by converts is in order. It was noted earlier that considerable barriers, including the risk of martyrdom, inhibit conversions to Christ in the Muslim world. These certainly apply to Palestinian Muslims, for a majority of the male converts there experienced or feared death threats. Those engaging in mission to Muslims will appreciate the fact that conversion among Muslims is a difficult enterprise and risky to the converts’ lives in many locations. Despite these difficulties, Muslim conversions do occur

Specific Social Consequences of Conversion

When referring in a generic sense to suffering 77% of the converts from the central Asian study said that they experienced opposition to their faith. More than half said that their relationships with people in their neighborhoods were worse as a result.

The Pakistani study described a greater range of punishment and produced some startling results:

1. A total of 6% of all the cases resulted in the murder of the convert. The striking aspect of this number is that only 1.7% of males were murdered while 42% of women were murdered. The researchers pointed out that because women’s lives are more structured by society with less individual freedom and because a women’s conversion independent of an attached man brings more shame on a family, the much higher murder rate of female converts is understandable.

2. Eleven percent of all the cases involved threats on the lives of the individuals. In most of these situations an actual attempt was made on the life of the individual in question.

3. About 33% received severe punishment but their lives were not
threatened. Severe punishment indicates any number of coercive measures. Many of the recipients were single young men. The punishment may have included beatings, physical deprivation, expulsion from the family, loss of a job, cutting the convert out of an inheritance, arranging his marriage with a Muslim relative, or having his wife and children taken from him.

4. Moderate punishment accounted for over one third (34%) of all cases. Emotional pressure was a prominent factor in this group as was boycott by other family members. Court cases, exclusion from family gatherings, and occasional loss of a job were also considered to be moderate responses as well.

5. 9% of converts received only mild pressure to return.

6. Seven percent received a neutral reaction.

7. None received a positive response.

What is striking about these numbers is the fact that fully half of the converts received moderate to neutral punishment in which they were not driven from their homes or cut off completely from their social structure. This is in Pakistan, considered by many to be one of the countries where a more extreme form of Islam is prevalent (Evans 2005:167-68).

Factors Influencing Severity of Punishment

The author of the study notes that under the Hanafi shari’ah code prevalent in Pakistan an individual who converts out of Islam is considered to be an infidel enemy. Their marriages should be dissolved and their property rights lost. Members of the public are given license to kill. While Pakistani law does not recognize these stipulations, some clerics and others still promote these ideas. While some have been murdered and others threatened, the actual murder of converts is relatively rare when taken as a whole, but there is still a prevailing attitude that a convert should be killed (Evans 2005:173-175).

1. Overwhelmingly converts to Christianity are relegated to the very lowest caste in Pakistani society. They are (whether truthfully or not does not matter) associated with such menial jobs as street sweepers. They are also often deprived by circumstance of worshipping with other Pakistani Christians although many do seek out the Christian community in the Punjab for fellowship, marriage, and other social needs.

2. Family dishonor is a large challenge for MBB converts. This seems to be the greatest factor in the death of such a high percentage of female converts. Since their status is so heavily protected conversion is a great loss of honor to the family.

3. Personal independence, ethnicity, and social class were found to be significant as determining factors in the severity of the punishment.
Trends showed that the more advanced one was in age the less likely was there to be any severe punishment. None of the married men among the 70 people surveyed were threatened with death. Since they did not live at home they could not be pressured in the same way. Single men also did not receive such harsh punishment if their father had already died when they converted.

4. Finally, modernity and urbanization were seen as mitigating factors on the severity of the punishment that converts received. Yet, the author points out that there is a great countertrend in an increasingly radicalized population in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Ways to Support Converts in Their Social Progress

1. Be prepared to work very discreetly and even secretively as long as necessary to avoid as much misunderstanding and upheaval as possible.

2. Express to the convert the importance of increased vigilance and obedience at home. If converts were honoring their parents and deferential to others in the family before, encourage them to be doubly so after their conversion.

3. Encourage them to pray much and also pray with and for them.

4. Face the challenges and reactions you may receive with humble courage.

5. The church or members should be prepared to provide a network of support not as a replacement of the family but to fulfill some of the lost roles/benefits in the event that the converts suffer loss in this area.

6. Have church members and leaders at various levels aware of the situation and let them give counsel and guidance.

7. Expect miracles and teach the converts to look for God’s intervention. This will also strengthen their faith.

8. Assure them that you will walk with them through this difficult process and be sure to be there in spite of any personal risk.

9. Exercise the greatest humility, tact, care, and diligence to not offer any offense in tense social situations after one’s conversion becomes known.


Some Closing Words

A Personal Experience

One day one of our church members was dying. Actually, she was being killed or more politely put, euthanized. In this overwhelmingly Muslim country doctors often euthanize a patient who has a terminal illness even if the patient presents only minor symptoms. One look at her and I understood what was happening. I began to shout and scream calling for my doctor friend. He is a good friend and a devout Muslim. We shared a
mutual respect for each other and discussed many things easily. He is devout but open-minded and I hope he perceives me the same way. Though fully ensconced in his culture he has shown independence that is rare. For instance when he married, he purposely broke Muslim and tribal custom and did not marry his beautiful first cousin. He says that for medical and genetic reasons he would not marry his close relative but I have always suspected additional reasons. He married a young lady from another tribe, one that is despised. However, because he is a doctor and very well respected, his family decided they would tolerate the marriage.

That day in the hospital I was beside myself and making a bit of a scene but knew that this dear church member would die unless something was done to reverse this euthanasia quickly. My friend was not on duty then but someone must have told him because he came and grabbed my hand and walked with me. “Marc,” he said, “you are a pastor so I will tell you something. Your church member is terminally ill.” “I know,” I pled, “but you have to bring her back, do all you can.” He was silent as he thought about the implications and probably wondered why I even cared about this poor lady who had been abandoned by her husband and left with five children while he had three other wives. He didn’t say much else but he pulled a few strings and got things done. Our church member hovered between life and death for a week. The ladies of the church kept a 24-hour vigil all of those days. They cleaned the member and made sure her IV was kept full with the right medicines, glucose, and vitamins. They made sure that while she was so helpless and comatose that her husband did not come and end her life.

After ten days at the doors of death this dear lady rebounded. She lived. It was a miracle. She had been cared for by her family—her church family. The ladies of the church who were former Muslims, animists, and some Christians from a variety of tribes had even sent her daughters away from the hospital to tend to other tasks and go to work while they cared for the mother in that dank hospital room day after day. This lady lived and is alive today—a testimony to the power of God and the love of a church family.

Oh, back to my doctor friend. Sometime later he told me, “You Adventists, what you did was good. I have never seen that. Not even blood family does what your church did.” He said some other things that let me know that the impression was deep. He was thinking. “Months later he told a colleague of mine while caring for him, “If I ever become a Christian I will become an Adventist. You make religion so simple.” He really is thinking, beginning to entertain thoughts that he would never have admitted to months earlier.
What the Church Can Do

The role of the church in Muslim settings is clear. No matter how few in number believers may be, they must act as family to one another carrying out the Acts 2 model. The circumstances in many Muslim lands are similar to what the early church endured at its inception. Converts were often cut off from their families and sorely persecuted. People back then joined at great sacrifice. People in Muslim lands today join the church at great sacrifice and while the church can never replace one’s family it should be willing to assume the roles that are so important if an individual has been cut off because of allegiance to Christ. The church can even intercede for the convert if possible. The larger world church can and should supply the resources necessary to help the church in Muslim lands be able to carry out a very discreet and possibly secret nurturing mission to individuals facing extreme social obstacles in conversion and supporting those who have openly professed their faith and are suffering. People like my doctor friend are watching and weighing and thinking about the obstacles. There is no greater witness to the power of the gospel than the gospel carried out in the lives of humble believers in Muslim lands. As Muslims see this, the gospel will appear simple and accessible—and appealing.

Muslim ministry presents many opportunities and many challenges. I remain optimistic that the best days of ministry to Muslims for the Seventh-day Adventist Church are still in the future. Rooted in a prophetic perspective of the role of the Adventist Church in the closing days of the earth’s history it is realistic to look for the day when Muslims will begin to turn to Christ openly in great numbers. Until then our work calls for great caution and care as we seek to strengthen what has been started and move into yet uncharted territory.

The Muslim Spiritual Progress Continuum

The Muslim Spiritual Progress Continuum (MSPC) is a first attempt at getting a handle on the spiritual progress that is unique to Muslims as they come to faith in Christ and move towards church membership. It is fairly self-explanatory and seeks to offer snapshots of the major areas of challenge in the process of conversion. It seeks to reflect—as much as can be done on paper—that the Muslim journey to Christ is inherently very challenging. If it can help church members working with Muslims gain a bit of sympathy, understand Muslims more deeply, commit to working for them in a patient way, and move beyond the polemics and politics of Muslin/Christian relations to form meaningful saving relationships with Muslims, then at least in part it has accomplished its goal.
Encounter: The person is exposed to the Bible, Christian testimony, Christian media, a dream, or a Christian family member. This begins a process of thinking, comparing and questioning that if continued will lead to the next level.

Exploration: The individual begins to seek proof to quiet his troubled mind and reinforce his comfort with either Islamic ideas or uncover answers to questions that have been raised through exposure to biblical ideas.

Evaluation: If there is a crisis stage for a Muslim in the process of coming to Christ, this is it. He begins to understand the implications of a decision to follow Christ across all domains: the social, the theological, and the cognitive-cultural.

Entrance: The person is making efforts to connect with other believers. He identifies himself as someone that has an affinity for those who follow Christ. He may or may not yet fully say he is Christian but he is moving toward the Church and identifies with other Muslims who are on the same journey.

Embodiment: He has found a new identity in Christ and is growing and connected in some tangible way to church fellowship if at all possible.
## The E-Scale Muslim Spiritual Progress Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Theological</th>
<th>Cognitive - Cultural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has a family member, friend, relative, or acquaintance who is Christian. Drawn by love.</td>
<td>Exposure to Biblical ideas the individual finds attractive. These ideas may be similar to what he has learned in Islam or totally different.</td>
<td>Shame still plays a large role in determining how he relates to exploring the Gospel. This person is both culturally and religiously. May still be hostile to the thought of ever being anything other than a Muslim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of Christ awakens a desire to know, explore. Secret quest for more knowledge. Prayers to God to lead.</td>
<td>Characterized not by rejection of Islam but by openness to Christ. Wrestling with level barriers. May or may not accept Christ.</td>
<td>This is a Muslim who is seeking. He is still a Muslim but has lost some of the cultural animosity toward the Bible and Christ. He may be exploring to prove himself right and others wrong, but he is exploring nonetheless. Still very secretive to avoid causing shame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of crisis. The realization of the cost of discipleship. May openly profess and suffer or remain secretly believing in Christ as a dis- tance. Still fully identified with Muslim community - does not venture to invest in Christians or other Muslims seeking Christ.</td>
<td>Understands Level 2 and 3 theological barriers and worldview issues. Weighing the consequences of an open profession of Christ. Could be a covert believer but is wrestling with weighty issues.</td>
<td>The shan/or Honor paradigm, cultural responsibilities and obligations present themselves with great force. He may feel internally conflicted and ill at ease. Worldview and Bible claims clash. This is a dangerous place for him. He can go either way at this point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expands social circle to include church members. Seeks to understand how to fit in with other believers. This stage can call for secrecy depending on the country.</td>
<td>Often identifies as Christian, seeks fellowship with Church. May still be very discreet, almost secretive. Continued growth in Christian worldview.</td>
<td>Makes the mental leap of considering himself a believer. Begins to critically assess his culture in light of the Bible. Begins the process of assimilation of gospel principles and rejection of parts of his culture/worldview that cannot fit with his faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to comfortably integrate with Christians. Active in quietly helping others who were like him. Often there is reconciliation or trace with family.</td>
<td>Has not only faith and become a well adjusted Christian, has a good grasp of the Bible worldview and helps others overcome theological barriers.</td>
<td>May be rejected or severely persecuted in this or the previous step. He seeks to stay attached to his family/culture but in some cases separation (hopefully temporary) may be necessary for safety. Has broad understanding of the great controversy and the role of his culture in it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes

1The referenced study is speaking of Mediterranean societies. It may be safely assumed that the large majority of the societies referred to are the Muslim societies of North Africa in which the honor/shame motif is a dominant social value. The secular and cosmopolitan European countries to the North do not hold so rigorously to the ancient honor/shame value.

2Many Christian scholars rightfully indicate that this Muslim doctrine is most likely a reaction to the Christological controversies of the 3rd through the 6th centuries and beyond. The arguments and heresies that were engulfing the Eastern Empire and much of the rest of the Christian world were not unnoticed by Mohammed. Some Christian scholars often go a step further to state that the Qur’an is not really against the concept of Jesus as the Son in the biblical sense of the word son. This may or may not be true. This however is conjecture no matter how plausible. It is impossible to know Mohammed’s intent in uttering the above referenced Qur’anic texts. Some like Samuel Schlorff have argued that it is only when applying a biblical hermeneutic and understanding to a Qur’anic text that such a concept can be sustained (the concept of the Son in the Qur’an). One should use Muslim hermeneutic tools to arrive at a Muslim understanding of a Qur’anic text. Orthodox Muslim teaching on this point is unanimous; Jesus is not the Son of God in any sense.

3This is not a suggestion that a Christian missionary try to disabuse Muslims of what he considers to be erroneous concepts of Christ. The Palestinian study referenced above indicates that rejection of Muslim beliefs most often happens after a personal encounter with Christ, which would seem to indicate that there may be (for many Muslims) a protracted process of assimilation of Bible teaching and rejection of Qur’anic concepts that are not in accordance with the Bible.

4Again reference must be made to the fact that Orthodox Muslim teaching says that the Bible has been corrupted. It is possible using a non-Muslim hermeneutic system to prove with some degree of certainty that when the Qur’an speaks about those who corrupt the scriptures it is not talking about Christians. However, this study references what mainstream Islamic scholars teach concerning the Bible. It is clear that the majority of mainstream Qur’anic scholars teach the Bible has been corrupted.

5It seems that Mohammed thought that Mary was part of the Christian Trinity. In all fairness one must remember that the Eastern Roman Empire was the theatre of the Christological debates that tore the church about. Since a large part of the church referred to Mary as the “mother of
God,” one can understand Mohammed’s reaction. Yet, the Qur’an forbids Allah having any equal associates.

Reference is here made to formal religious structures and systems that have highly defined belief and liturgical system such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Please see Halverson, “Animism the Religion of the Tribal World,” in the International Journal of Frontier Missions, 1998, pp. 59-68 for a full discussion of this topic.

Works Cited


Binghalib, Yasmine. 2007. Family Dynamics Between Arab Muslim Parents, Western Parents and Their Bi-Ethnic Children. MA Thesis, California State University, Sacramento, CA.


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