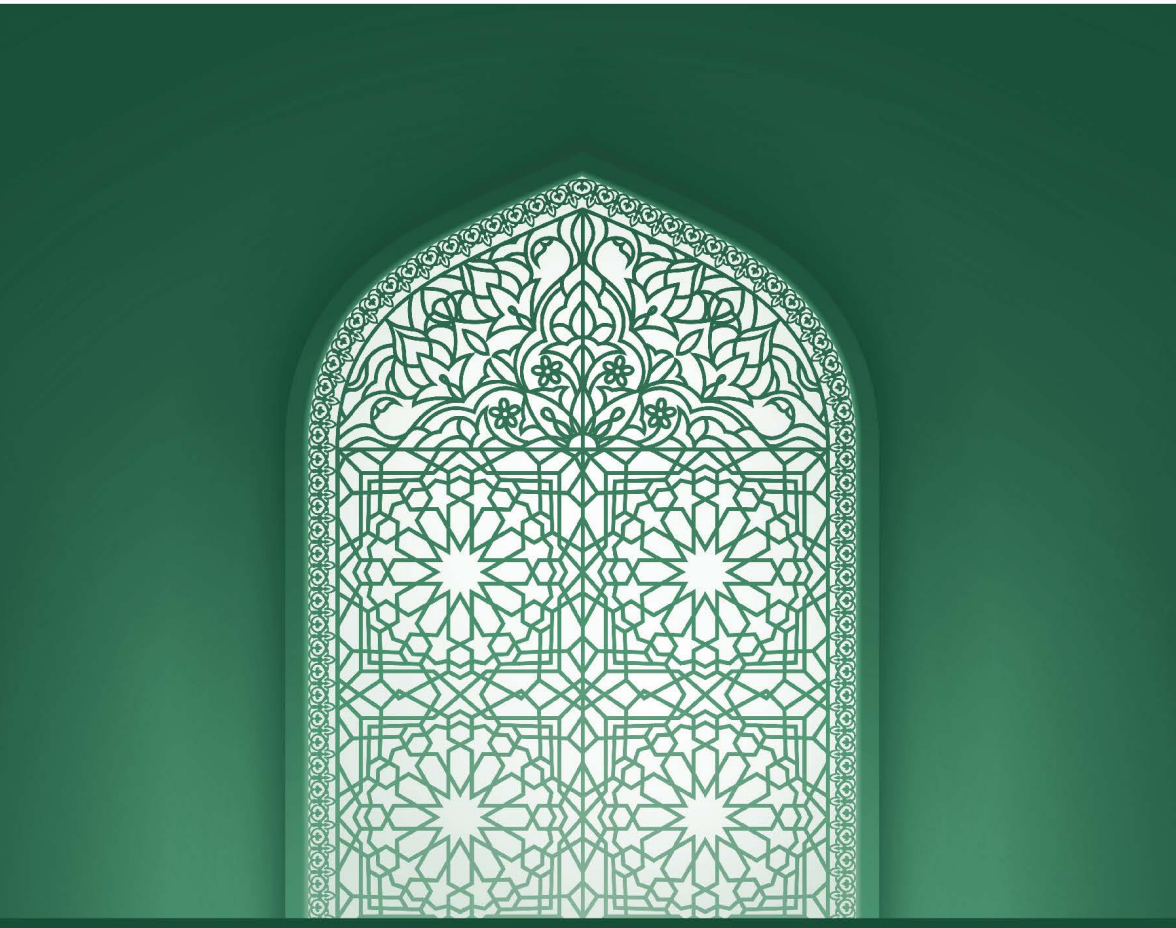
MUSLIM INSIDER CHRIST FOLLOWERS



THEIR THEOLOGICAL AND MISSIONAL FRAMES

JAN HENDRIK PRENGER

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Muslim Insider Christ Followers: Their Theological and Missional Frames
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCING THE DEBATE

He introduced himself as Abdullah. "I am a Muslim follower of Jesus," he said. "I am a completed Muslim." I spent a whole evening with Abdullah and one of his friends. A colleague of mine, who works with them on a regular basis, introduced them to me. Abdullah's testimony of how he had come to faith in Jesus Christ was amazing, and the testimony of his friend was even more remarkable. They were humble and polite men, but they were on fire for the Lord. Abdullah and his friend are believers in Christ who have decided to remain in their socioreligious community, and who retain their identity as members of that community, which makes them by definition Muslim insiders, according to Rebecca Lewis (2007). They are cultural and socioreligious insiders of their community of birth.

John Travis (pen name) developed the now well-known C1–C6 Spectrum in 1998 in which the *C* stands for "Christ-centered communities." With the exception of C6, which refers to a secret/underground community of believers, the higher the number on the C-scale, the more aspects of the language, culture, and socioreligious elements of the local Muslim population (the people on the inside) are an integral part of this Christ-centered community (Travis, 1998). In principle, every person who is part of a local community is an insider of that community.

I will refer to Muslim insiders as followers of Jesus who remain inside their socioreligious Muslim community (C5). Insider movements (IM) can be briefly defined as movements to obedient faith in Christ that remain integrated with or *inside* their natural community (Lewis, 2009). The definition section below provides a more detailed definition of IM.

The hotly debated topic of IM in Muslim contexts seems to lie at the center of the contextualization debate, which is related to the concept of *missio Dei* and the theology of religions. Well-known leaders such as John Piper speak out against insider strategies (Piper & Taylor, 2007), while the Lausanne Theology Working Group recently recognized God's

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church in many different cultures and forms, "including those that are strange and even disturbing to us." This working group confesses that we often fail to recognize the whole church, and it specifically identifies insider movements as part of God's church "whose contribution may be undervalued, diminished, overlooked, or even prevented." Referring to insiders, the group says, "This phenomenon of following Jesus within diverse religio-cultural traditions needs careful biblical, theological and missiological evaluation" (Lausanne Theological Working Group, 2010).

A topic related to IM is the current debate on how to best translate so-called Divine Familial Terms (DFT) such as *Son of God* when it refers to Jesus and *Father* when it refers to God, in Bible translation projects in Muslim contexts. Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL International use the meaning-based or functional equivalent approach to translation rather than a literal or formal equivalent one, based on their core value of accurate, natural, and communicative translations. This practice led in some cases to translating DFTs in other than the literal or commonly used words for *son* and *father* in certain languages of majority-Muslim communities, to correct misconceptions and avoid inaccuracy. They would use words and phrases that show respect and honor and that could be used in family circles, but that would not exclusively communicate a biological or siring relationship, in order to not perpetuate a misconception among many Muslims: that Christians believe that Allah had sex with Mary to have a son, Jesus.

This translation practice has been discussed with increasing intensity in journals and at conferences. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and the Assemblies of God (AoG) denominations in the US gave clear indications to Wycliffe and SIL in 2011 of plans to separate from them, based on DFT misalignment. I review some of their documents in the literature review. In 2012 Wycliffe and SIL International called for a global consultation and asked the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) to establish a panel to independently review their translations of *God the Father* and *Son of God*. WEA agreed in March 2012 and established a panel of twelve members in September 2012, under the leadership of Dr. Robert E. Cooley.[1] This panel submitted its findings and report by

1. WEA to Form Independent Review Panel on Wycliffe and SIL Bible Translation. (2012, March 12). Retrieved from http://www.worldea.org/news/3934

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April 2013 to SIL and Wycliffe, who had pledged beforehand to abide by the panel's recommendations, which had ended their funding crisis with AoG and PCA. The WEA panel report calls for translators to always use the most direct (i.e., common, literal) word for *son* and *father* in the target language that communicates "by nature." Wycliffe and SIL have changed their practices accordingly.

In late 2011, i2 Ministries published a book entitled *Chrislam: How Missionaries Are Promoting an Islamized Gospel*, edited by Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton, and Bill Nikides. According to the i2 Ministries website,[2] this organization engages in ongoing studies of Islam and the arguments Islamic apologists use in continuing to propagate Islam worldwide. They seek to develop tools that Christians in Islamic societies can use in their evangelism efforts to counter the arguments of Islamic apologists and bring the truth of the Bible and of Jesus to Muslims in each nation. They oppose IM: i2's founder and president makes the following statement on the Biblical Missiology website: "The Insider Movements (IM) methodology needs to be discussed and assessed until IM is no longer an Evangelical option for Christian missions to Muslims" (Lingel, 2010).

Journals and magazines such as *Mission Frontiers* (*MF*), *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (*EMQ*), the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (*IJFM*), the *St. Francis Magazine*, *International Bulletin of Mission Research* (*IBMR*), *Missiology: An International Review*, the Evangelical Missiological Society's *Occasional Bulletin*, and *Christianity Today* frequently feature articles on IM, both in support of and critical of these movements.

For example, the February 2011 issue of *Christianity Today* was largely devoted to IM and the idiom *Son of God* for Muslims. Collin Hansen mentions the success among Muslims of Bible translations that avoid the phrase *Son of God* but also identifies the concerns from some missionaries and scholars (Hansen, 2011). The *St. Francis Magazine* issues from August 2009 and December 2009 have multiple articles on IM, and in their April 2012 issue Bradford Greer (pen name) writes about the DFT controversy (Greer, 2012). *IJFM* devoted the July–September 2011 issue to this topic as well. I review a sample of the main articles in the literature review.

The four cover stories in the January/February 2013 issue of *Christianity Today* are on IM. The title of the main article is "Worshipping Jesus in

2. www.i2ministries.org

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the Mosque," by Gene Daniels (pen name), in which he interviews a Muslim follower of Isa (Daniels, 2013, pp. 23–27). Timothy Tennent reviews the hidden history of IM in the second cover story. He thinks that the current debate about C5 believers centers on five key issues: the biblical precedent of Acts 15; the relationship between personal salvation and identification with the larger church and historical Christian doctrines; the ethical question about encouraging insiders to retain a Muslim identity; IM as a new phenomenon or something coming from issues in the Protestant Reformation; and C5 being a permanent movement or transitional bridge (Tennent, 2013, pp. 28–29). John Travis wrote the third cover story, titled "Jesus Saves, Religion Doesn't," in which he shares his own experience in witnessing the start of an IM (Travis, 2013, p. 30). Phil Parshall authored the fourth cover story on IM, supporting C4 insiders but questioning C5 movements (Parshall, 2013).

Bradford Greer wrote a review in the Winter 2011 issue of *IJFM* on a book by Doug Coleman (pen name) titled *A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives: Theology of Religions, Revelation, Soteriology and Ecclesiology* (Coleman, 2011). Greer writes, "The title led me to assume that Doug Coleman was going to provide a theological analysis of insider movements. Many missiologists are eagerly awaiting studies of this nature" (Greer, 2011, p. 204). He goes on noting that Coleman did not do field research but only analyzed articles written primarily by Western authors (mostly articles by Kevin Higgins) who have written in favor of insider movements. I distinguish my study from Coleman's in that this study includes field research and has a focus on theology and missiology from an insider's perspective. According to Greer, missiologists are eagerly awaiting this study.

I trace the theological and missional frames, or paradigms, in the literature review in chapter 2 by identifying which frames and underlying assumptions typically lead to support of IM or to an opposing stance towards these movements. The literature review helped me design the research and formulate the initial and basic research questions. This study is a response to the call from Lausanne for further evaluation of IM. I researched the theological and missional frames of Muslim IM leaders, and the IM communal theologizing processes, and as such demonstrate their kind of Christ following.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

The church today is debating the validity of IM, often without knowing the theological and/or missional frames of IM leaders and their communal theologizing processes. Are Muslim insiders part of the body of Christ or a sect of Islam? Is IM a prescription of an approach or a description of what God is doing? How do leaders of IM and supporting practitioners know which theologizing processes are biblical? What are the theological and missional frames of IM leaders? The church often lacks theological and/or missional insights gained from solid research among insiders to conduct constructive dialogue on IM, and to apply biblical theologizing processes within IM. The voices of IM leaders should be heard, but they are lacking.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this grounded-theory study is to understand and explain the theological and missional frames of IM leaders (i.e., their view of God and his mission). The outcome of this study will lead to deeper insights and enrich the church's understanding of IM, making possible more informed and constructive dialogue on IM.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research question is, What are the theological and missional frames of IM leaders?

The sub-questions include:

1. How do Muslim insider leaders understand Allah and his plans and purposes?
2. How do Muslim insider leaders understand Isa al Masih and his role and identity?
3. How do Muslim insiders study the Tawrat, Zabur, and Injil and apply insights gained within IM?
4. How do IM leaders develop theological and missional frames within their communal context?

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