UNDERSTANDING

INSIDER MOVEMENTS

DISCIPLES OF JESUS WITHIN DIVERSE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

HARLEY TALMAN JOHN JAY TRAVIS EDITORS









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Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities

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CHAPTER 1

Insider Movements

Coming to Terms with Terms

John Jay Travis

Both Scripture and church history indicate that when people discover Jesus, they want to tell others about it. Similar to the woman at the well, who joyfully shared with fellow Samaritans,[1] many others over the centuries have told their families and friends about Jesus in ways that have led to movements. This present volume explores *insider movements,* whereby people of non-Christian religions follow Jesus as Lord and Savior while remaining integrally part of the family and socioreligious community of their birth. This first chapter focuses on the meaning and usage of a number of key terms and important related concepts found throughout the book.[2]

"Socioreligious" and "Religiocultural"

The terms "socioreligious" and "religiocultural" are used to describe the close relationship that is often observed between religion and culture. Millions worldwide understand their religion or religious identity as something inseparably bound to their ethnic, national, social, or family identity. It is instructive that many people with little or no belief in God or interest in spiritual matters still view themselves as members of a religion. This phenomenon might help explain why in the United States, for instance, a recent poll indicates that 77 percent of the population self-identify as "Christian"[3] even though it is hard to imagine that this many Americans are actual followers of Jesus. Similar statistics involving religious identity are found in other countries as well, causing some to speak of "cultural Jews," "cultural Muslims," or "cultural Christians" (note: while observers may use this terminology, members of these religions do not usually add the word "cultural" when referring to themselves). By using the terms "socioreligious" and "religiocultural," we remind ourselves that for most of the world, a change of religions is not simply a shift in personal beliefs; it means separation from family, community, and society.

"Christian," "Christianity," and "Follower of Jesus"

The way the terms "Christian" and "Christianity" are generally used in this book differs from the narrower meaning that evangelicals typically give them (i.e., denoting true saving faith in Jesus; being

1 John 4:39–42 states that through the woman's testimony and the visit of Jesus, many Samaritans came to believe that Jesus was the Savior of the world.

2 Because *UIM* contains writings from more than fifty authors who do not all use the same vocabulary, we cannot guarantee uniformity of terms among the various chapters. Thus in this chapter we will point out terms that have roughly equivalent meanings. Please refer to the glossary for other terms not mentioned here.

3 Frank Newport, "In U.S., 77% Identify as Christian," Gallup, December 2012, http://www.gallup.com/poll/159548/identify-christian.aspx.

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"born again"). Rather, most of the authors, having spent much of their lives in cross-cultural ministry, use the terms "Christian" or "Christianity" to designate socioreligious categories, as do many cultures of the world. Thus these terms are applied to both committed and nominal "Christians," be they Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, or other. The terms "follower/disciple of Jesus" or "follower/disciple of Christ" are more commonly used in this book to refer to those with true faith and heart allegiance to Jesus—what most evangelicals mean when they use the term "Christian." The initially strange-sounding phrase "non-Christian followers of Christ," therefore, would indicate people who are socioreligiously not "Christian"—they identify as Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, etc.—yet are spiritually, morally, and biblically true followers or disciples of Jesus.

"Insider," "Insider Movements," and Related Terms

Although the term "insider" can be used in a variety of ways, here we mean "a person from a non-Christian background who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior but retained the socioreligious identity of his or her birth." This means that in following Jesus, insiders have not left the religious community in which they were raised, nor have they joined a denomination or branch of Christianity.

Several good definitions of "insider movements" have been published and widely used since 2004.[4] In the following section is a working definition of this term based on key characteristics of these movements. First, though, we look at two other, related expressions: "Jesus movements within" and "the Insider Movement."

The term "Jesus movements within" (JMW) is often used in place of "insider movements."[5] Many prefer this term because of the clear focus on Jesus and the ability to indicate the religious community in which the movement is occurring: "a Jesus movement within the Hindu community," or "within a Muslim community," and so forth.

At times we read the term "the Insider Movement." Many consider this a misnomer, however, because there is no singular movement, organization, institution, or group that could rightly be called "*the* Insider Movement." The majority of insider movements worldwide are localized, organic, and largely unaware of each other. Hence most people who understand them speak of "insider movements" in the plural rather than "the Insider Movement."[6]

A Working Definition of Insider Movements

Throughout this book we only refer to movements as *insider* movements if they contain each of the five following dynamics or characteristics:[7]

1. *Following Jesus and the Bible:* following Jesus as the risen Lord and Savior and the Bible as the word of God.

4 See Kevin Higgins, "The Key to Insider Movements: The 'Devoted's' of Acts," *IJFM* 21, no. 4 (2004): 155–65 (*UIM,* chap. 25); Rebecca Lewis, "Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities," *IJFM* 24, no. 2 (2007): 75–76.

5 However, this term has other uses as well, so we will not use it here exclusively as a synonym for IMs.

6 Use of the singular by a few authors in this volume has been preserved when what they are referring to, albeit informally, is the insider paradigm.

7 This does not mean that the life of every individual in a given movement perfectly reflects these characteristics any more than members of any other spiritual community or church perfectly attain its ideals.

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2. *Fellowships with indigenous leadership:* gatherings occurring in culturally appropriate ways for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship (i.e., biblical *ekklesiae*) within families and social networks, led by fellow insiders whom God has raised up for leadership.

3. *Spiritual transformation:* spiritual transformation occurring through the leading of the Spirit and the study of Scripture, resulting in certain cultural and religious beliefs and practices being retained, others reinterpreted, and still others rejected.

4. *Remaining as witnesses:* disciples remaining integral members of their families and socioreligious communities, as witnesses for Jesus.

5. *Multiplication:* ongoing witnessing and prayer leading to the multiplication of new followers of Jesus, new insider leaders, and reproducing insider fellowships.

A useful working definition of insider movements, therefore, is the following: *Multiplying networks of Jesus followers in insider-led fellowships where the Bible is obeyed as the word of God, spiritual transformation occurs, and insiders remain part of the families and socioreligious communities of their birth, bearing witness to Jesus, their risen Lord and Savior.*

Related Concepts

The following concepts are explored in greater depth throughout the book. They are mentioned briefly here, however, because they bring greater immediate clarity to the working definition of insider movements given above.

1. While insider believers have some different beliefs from fellow Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Muslims, or Jews who do not yet follow Jesus, they intentionally look for ways to find common ground with their people. But they do this while staying true to the Bible and the daily leading of the Spirit in their lives. They retain anything from their socioreligious community that is helpful, praiseworthy, and not contrary to Scripture.

2. This dynamic of remaining within one's religious community while having some different beliefs causes both continuity and discontinuity with the past. This means that while much is retained, some beliefs and practices are reinterpreted or rejected. For instance, Hindu followers of Jesus reject the worship of multiple gods and goddesses (polytheism). Instead they worship only the one true God, the maker of heaven and earth, whom they know through Jesus Christ. They would, however, as God leads them, be part of the life of the local Hindu community as much as is biblically possible, not taking steps to adopt another socioreligious membership or identity.

3. In other contexts, Jewish followers of Jesus reject the standard Jewish teachings that Yeshua (Jesus) is not the Messiah and that the New Testament is not true Scripture, yet they still live traditionally Jewish lives as respectful members of the Jewish community. Muslim followers of Jesus whom we know reject the commonly disseminated teachings that Jesus did not die and rise again and that the New Testament has been corrupted; however, they continue to live as part of their Muslim community, respecting it and participating in its traditions and practices insofar as conscience and the Bible allow. Similar patterns of retaining, rejecting, and reinterpreting aspects of religious life and culture in light of the word of God and the leading of the Spirit are seen in insider movements among Buddhists and Sikhs as well (see chaps. 11 and 19). Even as Jews in the first century eventually pressured Jews who followed Jesus to leave, so it may happen with some insider movements. The point is that even if insiders

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are one day rejected or feel the need to leave, they are not the ones initiating the separation from their families and communities.[8]

4. It is crucial to point out, however, that even though those in insider movements follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior and obey the Bible as God's revealed word, *they should not be viewed as simply Christians by another name.* These are fresh expressions of faith in Jesus where he was not known before. Insider leaders are involved in the same process of self-discovery and self-theologizing that countless others have gone through since the gospel broke out of the Jewish context and entered Gentile contexts two thousand years ago. The reality of insider movements raises the question of who is really a part of the kingdom of God and the body of Christ, and of who has the right to interpret Scripture.

5. Finally, a key feature in describing the fellowships in these movements is that (depending on the local situation) they are open and inviting to those who do not yet know Jesus. In addition, these groups, which are generally family centered and home based, are relationally linked with numerous similar groups, fostering momentum and movement.

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8 There are many accounts of Jesus followers who, under threat of physical harm and even death, have felt forced to leave their family and community. Jesus predicted this would at times happen (e.g., Matt 10:21–23), and our prayers are with those who for the sake of Jesus have suffered separation from loved ones. However, insider movements are occurring where, for a variety of reasons explored in *UIM,* groups of insiders have found ways to remain within their natural social networks and still not compromise their faith in Jesus.

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