

The Insider Movement: A Brief Overview and Analysis

By Khalil Ullah



An astounding phenomenon, though not exclusive to ministry to Muslims, is overtaking much missionary work among Muslims. A growing number of professing Christians involved in witness to Muslims are a part of what is called, “Insider Movements,” or the “Insider Movement.” This controversial approach to ministry has resulted in many of its proponents affirming that Muhammad was a prophet from God, the Quran is at least partially-inspired Scripture, and it is possible for Muslims to retain their Muslim identity as “Muslim followers of Christ.” Such beliefs have resulted in radical practices such as professing Christians and former Muslims legally converting to Islam and the production of “Muslim-idiom translations” of the Bible that do not literally translate such words and phrases as “Son of God,” “Son of Man,” and “Son” in reference to Jesus and “Father” in reference to God.

Another aspect of this phenomenon is the relative ignorance of the Insider Movement among churches and individual Christians, including those who pray for and financially support its proponents. It may not be an exaggeration to say that every evangelical organization in witness to Muslims is affected in some way by the Insider Movement. Becky Lewis, writes for *International Journal of Missiology*:

According to definitions given by several proponents: An insider movement is any movement to faith in Christ where the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where believing families, as valid expressions of faith in Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett
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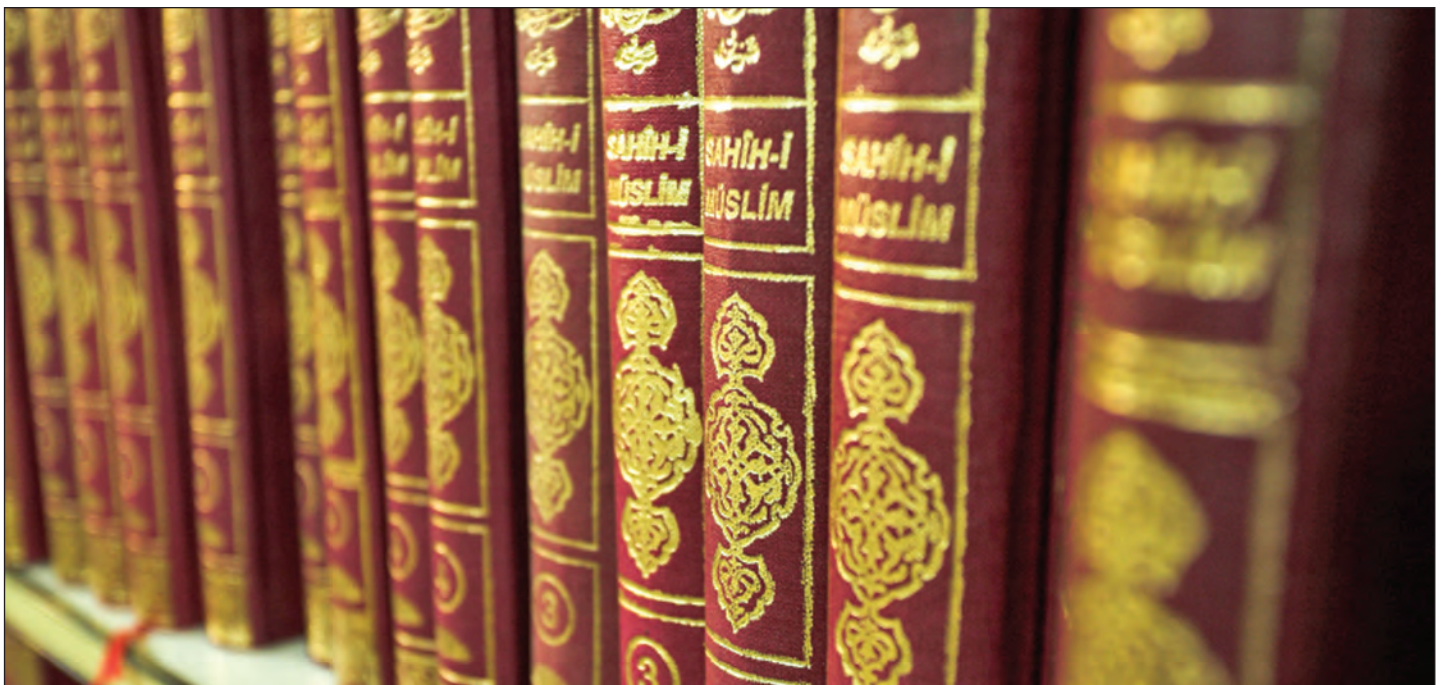
I hope you will take the time to read and digest the lead article of this *Intercede*. Missiologically speaking, no issue poses a greater challenge to the Church than providing an adequate witness of Jesus Christ to the world's 1.4 billion Muslims. Islam has erected most every kind of barrier imaginable.

In most Muslim countries, political and religious barriers, whether formally codified by law or not, prevent Muslims from “changing religion.” Family barriers usually dictate that a member of the family who desires to openly follow Christ is often a likely candidate for murder. Culturally, a convert risks bringing debilitating shame on his family. It is usually a burden that cannot be tolerated – and may be resolved by restoring the family honor through disowning the convert, or at worst, taking the life of the apostate family member.

Given the difficulty of penetrating the barriers of Islam, it is sometimes tempting for those trying to share Christ with Muslims to compromise Scriptural principles – hoping to make the task a little easier. I have no wish to offend anyone who is sincerely and creatively trying to

build bridges to Muslims in order that they might hear the Good News of the gospel. However, the writer of our lead article, Khalil Ullah, has taken a close look at “The Insider Movement” and concludes that “many of its proponents affirm that Muhammad was a prophet from God, the Quran is at least partially-inspired Scripture, and it is possible for Muslims to retain their Muslim identity as “Muslim followers of Christ.” Such beliefs have resulted in radical practices such as professing Christians and former Muslims legally converting to Islam and the production of “Muslim-idiom translations” of the Bible that do not literally translate such words and phrases as “Son of God,” “Son of Man,” and “Son” in reference to Jesus and “Father” in reference to God.

Again, creative approaches to reaching Muslims are almost always necessary. But if Scripture and its principles are clearly violated, then it is important to place those practices in the light. Khalil Ullah is a pseudonym for a veteran worker among Muslims. While space constraints do not permit an exhaustive treatment here, Khalil Ullah has done a fine job of shining the light of Scripture on several critical points about the Insider Movement. 





Muslim World News

Pakistan

Setback in blasphemy case

The case of Asia Noreen, the first Christian woman sentenced to death in Pakistan on blasphemy charges, suffered a major setback when her most vocal supporter, the governor of Punjab Province, was gunned down by one of his police bodyguards.

The lives of Noreen and Gov. Salman Taseer were at risk since the day he, his wife and daughter visited her in the Sheikhpura District Jail on Nov. 22, 2010, after news of her conviction appeared in the media.

Taseer had openly criticized the blasphemy statutes and vowed to try to repeal the “black laws” in parliament. He also promised Noreen (also called Asia Bibi) that he would recommend a presidential pardon for her.

The governor’s assurance and his support for Noreen gave new hope to the impoverished mother of two children and stepmother to three others – and drew violent condemnation from Islamist forces, sparking countrywide protests. — *Compass*

Egypt

Christian arrested for his faith

An Egyptian who left Islam to become a Christian and lost his wife, children and business is waiting to see if the government will take away his freedom for “defaming” Islam.

Ashraf Thabet, 45, is charged with defaming a revealed religion, Article 98f of the Egyptian Penal Code. The charges stem from Thabet’s six-year search for spiritual meaning that eventually led him to become a Christian. During his search, he shared his doubts about Islam and told others what he was learning about Jesus Christ.

Local religious authorities, incensed at Thabet’s ideas, notified Egypt’s State Security Intelligence service (SSI), which arrested and charged him with defamation. If found guilty, Thabet would face up to five years in jail. But because prosecutors have made no move to try the case, Thabet lives in limbo and is subject to a regular barrage of death threats. — *Compass*

Morocco

Apostate remains imprisoned

Nearly five years into the prison sentence of the only Christian in Morocco serving time for his faith, Moroccan Christians and advocates question the harsh measures of the Muslim state toward a man who dared speak openly about Jesus.

Jamaa Ait Bakrim, 46, has been incarcerated for five years at Morocco’s largest prison, Prison Centrale, in Kenitra.

An outspoken Christian convert, Bakrim was sentenced to 15 years in prison for “proselytizing” and destroying “the goods of others” in 2005 after being convicted of burning two defunct utility poles located in front of his private business in a small town in south Morocco.

Advocates and Moroccan Christians said, however, that the severity of his sentence in relation to his misdemeanor shows that authorities were determined to put him behind bars because he persistently spoke about his faith. — *Compass*

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You follow Jesus as a Hindu, as a Muslim, as a Buddhist, or as whatever other variety of socio-religious community you might be from.

The Insider Movement for Muslims is any approach in which Muslims are told that they can retain their Muslim identity and have saving faith in Jesus Christ. The premise is that this will allow such believers to remain “inside” their family and community and be witnesses to them. If such believers identify themselves as “Christians” it would most likely force them “outside” of their families and communities and cut off their ability to witness to them. Fouad Accad, a late director of the Bible Society of Lebanon, while not using the phrase “Insider Movement” in his book, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam*, nevertheless strongly advocates for this approach:

If a Muslim could trust Christ without alienating his family and friends, he could become a means within his own community to testify to them...Today there are Muslims trusting Christ in Muslim lands who do not consider that they have become "Christians" (the word has a political connotation to Muslims), but instead see themselves as having become truly Muslim (the word Muslim means "surrendered to God").

“Muslim-idiom translations” of the Bible

Another important aspect of the Insider Movement is the rise of “Muslim-idiom translations” of the Bible. It may be argued that the initial idea for some of these “translations” was unrelated to the Insider Movement, but the two have since come to be closely allied.

These “translations” have appeared in audio, print and video versions of the Bible. The list of languages in which at least any portion of Scripture has incorporated such “Muslim-idioms” and/or its guiding principles is growing. The author is aware of such “translations”, whether in part or in whole, in various dialects of Arabic, as well as in the Baluchi, Bengali, Dari, Indonesian, and Malay languages. Three very controversial aspects of such “idioms” have to do with:

1. Replacing filial language (i.e. “Father”, “Son of God”, and “Son”).
2. A non-literal translation of “Son of Man” in reference to Jesus Christ.
3. The use of Islamic honorifics (using Islamic titles for



Jesus and other Biblical people that Muslims regard as “prophets”. This includes using “Master/Mister” prior to the name of Jesus, “the Prophet” prior to proper names like Moses, David, Solomon, etc. and using the phrase, “peace be upon him,” after the names of “prophets”).

Analysis

In order for an approach or movement to be considered Biblical it must be able to withstand the scrutiny of the Old and New Testaments. While the following is not a comprehensive list, looking at four of the foundational premises of the Insider Movement in light of Scripture will help us to arrive at a proper assessment:

1. Insider Movement premise: being an “insider” will result in witness to family and others in one’s community. *Challenge:* Witnessing is the result of obedience to God’s Word and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Consider some Biblical reasons for witnessing:

- excitement about what Jesus has done for us (Mt. 9:30-31; Mk. 1:43-45; Mark 7:36-37; Lk. 5:14-15)
- the fear and love of God (2 Cor. 5:11-15)
- Jesus’ call to proclaim the Gospel (Mk. 3:13-14; Rom. 1:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:16)
- Jesus’ command to witness to everyone (Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 24:45-48; Jn. 20:21)
- The Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:49-49; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4ff.)

Another consideration concerning witness is how Jesus, the apostles, and first Christians (i.e. Jews) regard-

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ed their identity. Believers were taught and practiced baptism, which was a public identification of following Jesus (Jn. 4:1-2; Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38-41). They also met together for instruction (Acts 2:42-47). There was no known effort to highlight their being Jews in order to witness to unsaved family and friends. This is all the more remarkable when we remember that Jews in the first century faced similar pressures and persecution as do Muslims for following Jesus Christ.

2. Insider Movement premise: being an “insider” will result in acceptance of such a witness.

Challenge: Jesus’ teaching and experience while on earth was exactly the opposite of this premise: “Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor” (Mt. 13:57). The people of His community wanted to kill Him after He preached to them (Lk. 4:28-30), His family considered Him mentally deranged (Mk. 3:21, 31-32), and His brothers did not believe in Him (Jn. 7:2-5). Consider the following passages from the Bible that stand in contrast to the above premise:

- Jesus promised that some will accept our witness while others will not (Jn. 15:20)
- Jesus promised to divide households (Mt. 10:34-39)
- In marriages where only one spouse is a believer, there’s no guarantee that the witness of the believing spouse will result in salvation of the unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:16)
- Jesus told the Apostle Paul that the Jews (His community) would not receive His testimony and commanded him to go to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21)

It is impossible for any human to save the soul of another human. Redemption of the soul is the work of God (Ps. 49:6-9; Mt. 19:25-26) and the convincing work that leads a person to be saved is also the work of God, the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:6-11). This is not to minimize the role of witnessing but it does counter the false presupposition that remaining “inside” one’s family and community guarantees acceptance of the “insider’s” witness.

3. Insider Movement premise: “Muslim” has no religious significance – it only refers to culture.

Challenge: By assigning a new meaning to “Muslim” that Muslims themselves do not accept is at best disingenuous and at worst deceptive. The retention of “Muslim” as an identity is based on creating a double entendre in which it means one thing for “Muslim followers of Christ” but another for “regular” Muslims who properly understand the term to mean an adherent of Islam which includes the belief and confession that Muhammad is the final prophet of God and that the Quran is God’s Word. The Bible is very clear regarding the importance of truth and honesty:

- God does not lie and cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18)
- Jesus, God incarnate, is the Truth (Jn. 14:6)
- Satan is the father of lies, not God (Jn. 8:44)
- Believers are to “put off” lying (Eph. 4:25)
- 2 Cor. 4:2 - Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

4. Insider Movement premise: Filial language (i.e. “Father” and “Son”) and the phrases “Son of God” and “Son of Man” are not divinely inspired terms that must be literally translated.

Challenge: If the Bible is divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:15-16) so that even the use of a word in its singular form (e.g. “seed” in Gal. 3:16) points to Jesus, how much more three of the most important designations of our Lord: “Son,” “Son of God,” and “Son of Man”? Jesus’ use of different names and titles for Himself is consistent with God’s self-disclosure through different names in the Old Testament. If these three designations can be substituted with other words and phrases ultimately these terms are superfluous to understanding the Person of Jesus. Consider the significance of the following:

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Son:

- at Jesus' birth (Lk. 1:32)
- at Jesus' baptism (Mt. 3:17)
- the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:5)
- a clear claim to divinity (Jn. 5:16-26; 10:24-39)
- in the Trinitarian baptismal formula (Mt. 28:19)
- in Old Testament prophecies of Jesus (Ps. 2:12; Is. 9:6)

Son of God:

- at Jesus' birth (Lk. 1:35)
- even Satan and demons recognized this fact about Jesus (Mt. 4:3ff; 8:29)
- was Peter's great confession of faith (Mt. 16:16)
- the primary conclusion that people must come to about Jesus in order to be considered believers (Jn. 20:31)
- Old Testament revelation about the Creator (Pr. 30:4)

Son of Man:

- Jesus' most-used title for Himself
- Old Testament phrase referring to humanity (Num. 23:19; Ps. 8:4; Ez. 2:1, et. al.)
- Old Testament prophecy regarding the Messiah (Dan. 7:13; Mt. 26:64)
- Provides a linguistic "parallel" by which to help understand "Son of God"

Father:

- the only way Jesus addressed God in prayer with the exception of His quoting Ps. 22:1 while on the cross
- the way to address God in prayer (Mt. 6:9)
- the way God desires to relate to people (Mt. 5:45; Prodigal Son: Lk. 15:11-32)
- points to the believer's intimacy with God (Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 4:6)
- points to the unity and intimacy between God the Father


- and Jesus the Son (Mt. 11:27; Jn. 1:18; 10:30; 17:21)
- in the Trinitarian baptismal formula (Mt. 28:19)

The goal of any Bible translation must be faithfulness to the original texts. To "translate" according to an audience's sensibilities, real or perceived, changes the focus from conveying the author's intent to what pleases people – a very slippery slope indeed!

Conclusion

Many individuals within reputed evangelical missions organizations, publications, and programs involving denominations and para-church ministries have been promoting "Insider Movements" as both a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, as well as a biblical method of culturally-sensitive or contextualized way of effectively ministering the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Muslims. In light of the Bible's teaching, some of the foundational premises of the Insider Movement are seen to be in error.

Ultimately, the Bible does not allow for retaining any identity that conflicts with one's commitment to Jesus Christ. Jesus made it very clear that commitment to Himself takes precedence over all other affections and identities (see Mt. 10:32-39; Lk. 14:25-35). The Insider Movement, regardless of intent, is a syncretistic approach that is Biblically untenable. A great missionary to Muslims, Samuel Zwemer, wisely observed, and with which we conclude:

A passion for Muslim souls does not mean that we are to compromise or to conciliate at any price. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." 

Unreached People Group: *Rashaida of Sudan*

The colorful Rashaida of Sudan and Eritrea migrated from Saudi Arabia about 170 years ago. They are staunch Muslims, claiming a blood connection to prophet Muhammad. Living in the desert along the coastline of the Red Sea, their homeland extends from Massawa, Eritrea, to Port Sudan, Sudan. Approximately 98,000 Rashaida live in Sudan and 43,000 live in Eritrea. The Rashaida are desert-dwellers. By choice, they live a harsh life. As a people group, they typically separate themselves from society and government control. Efforts to reach the Rashaida with an adequate witness of Jesus Christ are underway. Here are some beginning prayer points:

- The "seeds" that have recently been planted – by a visiting Christian team.
- The need for long term laborers who would commit to reach the Rashaida.
- Adequate finances for long term laborers and projects.
- God-sent dreams and visions to occur among the Rashaida.

For further information on the Rashaida people, visit www.joshuaproject.net



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Facebook. Please join today.*



Friday, March 4, 2011. Please pray

...for minority Christians in Indonesia. They make up approximately 10 percent of the populace and Muslims comprise nearly 89 percent. The total population of Indonesia is approximately 230 million.

...for the Church in Azerbaijan. Pressure on Christians from the Muslim government is continuing.

...for Muslims in Canada where Islam is the fastest growing religion. Roughly 650,000 Muslims live in Canada.

Friday, March 11, 2011. Please pray

...for Christian missionaries in the Muslim world. Islamic governments exert pressure on Christian workers, with threats of deportation often used to restrict missionary activity.

...for the Muslims of Yemen, the poorest country in the Arabian peninsula. Pray that the Gospel of Jesus Christ would find open hearts in this forgotten land.

...for southern Thailand. Violence continues through Muslim unrest. Pray for a permanent peace.

Friday, March 18, 2011. Please pray

...for the few overt Christians in the Maldives. The government mandates that all citizens must be Muslims.

...for Christian missionaries in Nigeria. In the 1960s, approximately 10,000 expatriate missionaries worked in Nigeria. Today the number is estimated at around 500. However, many Nigerian nationals have assumed the mantle, acting as missionaries inside their own country.

...for protection for the Christian community in Iraq. Christians continue to flee Iraq in alarming numbers, and threats from Muslim radicals remain constant.

Friday, March 25, 2011. Please pray

...for the tense situation in Muslim areas of the Philippines. The past 40 years of violence have seen thousands of deaths.

...for MBBs across the Muslim world desperately seeking discipleship and fellowship.

...for approximately 70,000 international students in the U.S. — a substantial portion come from Muslim countries.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. — 1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



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Friday, April 1, 2011. Please pray

...for an end to the turmoil in Kenya. Muslims make up only 10 percent of the country, but are growing faster than any other group.

...for continued successful witness of Jesus Christ to Muslims through print, television, radio and Internet ministries.

...for Saudi nationals who are secret Christians. The government refuses to acknowledge the existence of a single one.

Friday, April 8, 2011. Please pray

...for Libya. Pray that Christian radio would penetrate Libya, where there is little opportunity for Christian witness.

...that through dreams, literature or Christian witness, Muslims would have an opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ.

...for persecuted Christians in Iran perpetually suppressed by the government.

Friday, April 15, 2011. Please pray

...for the Good News of Jesus Christ to reach the Muslims of India. India is home to 140 million Muslims, the second highest number of any country on earth.

...for the country of Bosnia. Saudi Arabian funds have built or renovated several hundred mosques in or around Sarajevo.

...that vibrant churches will be planted and grow across the Muslim world.

Friday, April 22, 2011. Please pray

...for Christian teachers working in secondary schools in the Muslim world. Pray that doors will open for them to share the love of Jesus Christ.

...for house churches created since the Taliban's removal in Afghanistan. Pray that God's protection would be on many secret believers that risk danger to attend these meetings.

...that the day will come when spiritual walls will fall across the Muslim world and Christian witness will be unfettered.

Friday, April 29, 2011. Please pray

...that the 130 million Muslims of Bangladesh will hear the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. The majority follow folk Islam a blend of indigenous culture, overlaid by a veneer of Islam. May Christians be faithful in reaching out to them.

...for indigenous Christian pastors across the Muslim world.

...for the Alawite Muslims of Syria. Pray that through their unique belief system, they might be more open to the Gospel.