

Effective Evangelism: JAE352

CHRISLAM: INSIDER MOVEMENTS MOVING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

by Joshua B. Lingel and Bill Nikides¹

This article first appeared in the Effective Evangelism column of the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, volume 35, number 02 (2012). For further information or to subscribe to the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>

What is Chrislam? In Nigeria, Chrislam's church/mosque members practice "running deliverance"² and believe both the Qur'an and the Bible are holy texts.³ That's not the Chrislam of this article. Chrislam, others suggest, is the merger of Islam and Christianity as evidenced by the Common Word document.⁴ It is pastors speaking in mosques, imams preaching in churches, and the Qur'an read to Christian congregations. It's a growing concern—but that's not the Chrislam of this article, either.

MISSIONARIES ARE DOING WHAT?

The Chrislam of this article is an actual missionary strategy for Muslim ministry. Some Western missionaries who endorse this version of Chrislam refer to the early church's approach to the salvation of the Gentiles (Acts 15) and draw a parallel to contemporary evangelism, discipleship, and church planting with Muslims. As one missionary describes Chrislamic missions: "If you are in a Muslim community, or a Buddhist community, or a Hindu community, you maintain that identity in that socio-religious community. That is where you work out your discipleship to Jesus. You follow Jesus as a Hindu, as a Muslim, as a Buddhist, or whatever other variety of socio-religious community you might be from."⁵ Accordingly, this form of Chrislam has assumed another moniker—insider movements (IM)—based on its encouragement of the target group to remain "inside" their socioreligious community. The IM has taken root especially in Muslim contexts.

SYMPTOMS OF CHRISLAM

In the United States, missionaries teach conferences encouraging Christians to share Jesus from the Qur'an. For example, the "Jesus in the Qur'an" conferences (JIQ) exegete Qur'anic verses about Jesus and give them new, Christianized meanings. Indeed, JIQ instructors say that the Qur'an teaches the Trinity. They instruct attendees to "start with what a Muslim *knows, affirms and understands* in the Qur'an" (emphasis in original),⁶ affirming, for example, that Sura 4:171 of the Qur'an teaches the Trinity: "Christ Jesus the son of Mary was indeed an apostle of God and **his word**, which he bestowed on

Mary, and a **spirit** proceeding from him.”⁷ However, Muslim exegetes reject the Trinity and understand this verse as denying Jesus’ divinity.⁸ This Christianization of the Qur’an doesn’t create doors of opportunity for witness; it stirs emotions of hostility on the part of Muslims, and naturally so. Christians don’t appreciate it when Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Muslims reinterpret the Bible’s original meaning. It’s offensive and deceitful to take a Muslim’s scripture and make it say what it does not.⁹

The “Common Ground” conferences have similar teachings. “Common Ground” is a broad-spectrum teaching that Christianizes the Qur’an and Islam. In doing so, it inoculates those who go through the teaching against a proper understanding of this inherently anti-Christian religion. The Qur’an becomes a tool for evangelism, lending it credibility, rather than understanding it as a book that denies the crucifixion,¹⁰ the Trinity,¹¹ and Jesus as the Son of God.¹² This teaching strongly suggests that the legitimacy of Muhammad’s prophethood is a matter of personal choice for new believers; that is, rather than a false prophet, Muhammad may be considered prophetlike. Kevin Higgins, a noted IM proponent, is more direct in his unpublished paper circulated by former Muslims in 2007:

Perhaps one of the most intriguing developments in missiological discussion in the last 10 or more years has been the subject of so-called “insider movements.” Particular attention has been given to such movements within Islamic contexts. One of the major points debated in this discussion among practitioners and theorists is the question of the Islamic creed. In short, the question is: can a follower of Jesus, say with integrity the Islamic creed, There is no god but Allah. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah? In this paper I will seek to outline some biblical, historical, and Qur’anic basis for answering this question in the affirmative.¹³

“Common Ground” also teaches other troubling notions of the kingdom of God in which there is no difference between Islam and Christianity.¹⁴

Several years ago, I (Lingel) met a missionary at the national Vineyard pastors conference. He said he was ministering in Indonesia and seemed to be acting as an *imam* (a Muslim prayer leader) of a *masjid* (a Muslim place of prayer) he had joined. He said he performed the *salat*, or daily prayers, and that he wanted to make the pilgrimage to Mecca (though his wife had not given her approval). This missionary also said he preached in the masjid on *juma* or Friday. I understood him to mean he preached the Islamic *khutbah* or traditional sermon that emulates Muhammad. Perhaps the most problematic thing about all this was that he was raising money with several Calvary Chapels, though I know they were unaware of the depths of his practices as a Chrislamic missionary. Recently someone returned from Afghanistan who reported that Western missionaries were participating in Insider Movement activities in mosques there.¹⁵

I (Lingel) have consulted with the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) on missions and evangelism among Muslims at various times. At a May 2009 consultation, SBC statistician Jim Haney stated that there are tens of thousands of *Isa al-masih jamaats*, or Jesus congregations, in northern Africa. But the members of these

jamaats call themselves Muslims, do not believe in the Trinity, and believe Muhammad is a prophet of God. Are they Christians or Muslims? Why talk about them in terms of missionary success?

One battle internal to the SBC is the validity of using the so-called *Camel Method*, a book developed by Kevin Greeson. It essentially utilizes many Qur'anic verses, rather than the Bible, to witness to Muslims. There are substantial critics of the method from within the SBC, from church leaders, North American Missions Board, and presidents of seminaries, to the highest officers as they recognize that the nature of it is antithetical to the clear witness of the church.

In Malaysia, so-called "Muslim-friendly" translations of the Bible are replacing *Son of God* with *prince* [putera].¹⁶ Perhaps this does not seem important at first blush, but consider that at Jesus' baptism the Father says, "This is My beloved *Son* in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17, emphasis added).¹⁷ In Muslim-friendly translations, Jesus is no longer Son to the Father; now He is *prince*, which is a functional denial of the historic formulation of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—if not an essential denial. And what happens to the fatherhood of God if Jesus is no longer the Son? Again, the answer is quite obvious.

The Arabic and Bangla (Bangladesh) translations display an even more dramatic change. In Arabic, Bible translations err by translating "Father" as "Lord," "Guardian," "Most High," and "God."¹⁸ In Bangla, "Son of God" is mistranslated "Messiah of God," consistent with the Qur'an's *Isa al-Masih* (Jesus the Messiah), which references the merely human Jesus.¹⁹

A translation team in Turkish, in part coordinated by Frontiers,²⁰ produced a translation of Matthew. It doesn't use the literal word for *son* in Turkish (*o ul*), to refer to Jesus as Son of God. It uses a word that is closer in meaning to *representative* (*vekil*). And it doesn't use the literal word for *Father* (*Baba*) to refer to God; it uses the word *mevla*, which is a religious word that refers to God but has no connotation of fatherhood. The Turkish church leadership has broadly rejected it. As one missionary there reports, "To obscure in Turkish what is very clear in Greek makes it unusable."

As Emily Belz of *World* magazine reports, "Hersman estimated that of 200 translation projects Wycliffe/SIL linguists have undertaken in Muslim contexts, about 30 or 40 'employ some alternate renderings' for the divine familial terms."²¹ These projects need to be defunded.

To legitimize this form of Chrislam, impressive statistics are touted, such as representations that there are three hundred thousand to one million new believers in a Muslim country that is not often named.²² In some missionary writings, that country is Islampur, but really it's Bangladesh.

And in Bangladesh, the insider movements have wrought havoc for the existing church. The missionary proponents of IM tell the insiders—Muslims who become Christians but remain inside Islam—they are not to have dealings with the existing church. The missionaries talk about the hundreds of thousands who have come to Christ, but one insider who left the IM and became a visible Christian reports that the number of insiders couldn't be more than ten thousand.²³ Other former insiders have

reported publicly that many insiders are really Muslims who will do whatever it takes for the jobs and money they are offered by pro-IM ministries to feed their families. Likewise, a significant percentage of insider leaders in Bangladesh were already baptized Christians who were convinced by missionaries to revert to their former Muslim identities. In other words, the IM of Bangladesh appears to be balderdash, a fundraising mechanism outside Bangladesh.²⁴

IS THERE A CURE?

IM proponents insist their approach is biblical and use both Old Testament and New Testament passages to legitimize their belief that Muslims can know Jesus yet remain inside Islam. Space does not permit examination of all passages Chrislamists use, but two favorite proof texts are instructive.

Genesis 14: Melchizedek

Higgins believes Melchizedek, a precursor of Jesus, acts like an insider, someone worshipping the true God in another religious tradition. The application Higgins makes for today, of course, is that Yahweh is also working within Islam. Higgins writes, "Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek (a pagan priest of 'God Most High') shows us that the author of Genesis sees El and Yahweh as the same Being. The fact that Abraham offers a tithe suggests an acceptance of the validity of Melchizedek's priesthood and thus, religion....an astonishing acknowledgement of God's work in another religious tradition."²⁵

Higgins correctly observes that *El* and *Yahweh* are the same being and that Melchizedek is a Messianic type. The trouble is not his observations, but his conclusion.

The Who and What of Melchizedek

Melchizedek is interesting because he suddenly pops in and out of the biblical narrative. His name appears twice in the Old Testament: Genesis 14 and Psalm 110:4. Although he is a person of keen interest, he remains a man of mystery. Indeed, even his role is a mystery. Is his appearance a Christophany? Is he a Messianic type, just a historical figure, or perhaps some combination?

We have no record of Jesus uttering Melchizedek's name, but He certainly understood Psalm 110, which mentions Melchizedek as messianic. The psalm characterizes Melchizedek's priesthood this way: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (v. 4). As Messiah, Jesus would have understood His own priesthood, like Melchizedek's, to be combined with kingship. And His priesthood would be unique in that it was not Levitical, which was hereditary. Jesus knew Melchizedek was a unique historical figure who foreshadowed Him.

Melchizedek's Religion. Against this background, let's examine Higgins's use of Melchizedek to justify his Chrislam. Higgins reasons that Abraham offered a tithe to the priest, signifying Abraham accepted the religion as valid; therefore, God is at "work in another religious tradition." What religious tradition was this and whose was it?

Higgins doesn't tell us. He leaves it as an imponderable. But the clue is in the wider context.

Noah was Abraham's great predecessor. When he disembarked from the ark, among the first things he did was offer a sacrifice (Gen. 8:20). Where did Noah learn to sacrifice? We know that his sons, specifically Shem—whose descendants are mentioned both before and after Babel (Gen. 11:1–9)—would have witnessed the sacrifice. Abraham was in the line of Shem (Gen. 11:10–26).

Continuing backward through Genesis, Noah's great (to the seventh power) grandfather was Seth. After Seth fathered Enosh, "men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26). So Seth taught Enosh to sacrifice, who taught his son, until it was eventually taught to Noah and then Shem. From Shem it finally reached Abraham. Adam taught Seth about sacrifice and we can rationally suppose that Adam was taught directly by Yahweh.

Where does this take us? Remember that Higgins nebulously concludes that God is at "work in another religious tradition." He even calls Melchizedek a "pagan priest." How he concludes that Melchizedek was a pagan priest (i.e., a priest of gods other than Yahweh) is mystifying. Melchizedek's tradition is quite likely one that Yahweh Himself initiated. Indeed, Yahweh clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins to hide their shame (Gen. 3:21) and He accepted Abel's animal sacrifice instead of Cain's sacrifice of crops (Gen. 4:4–5). Thus, if it's true that Melchizedek is not following pagan traditions, then Yahweh is not at work inside another religious tradition, but inside His own—the very one He created. Robert Culver does not take the true worship of Yahweh back to Adam, but he says, "The appearance of Melchizedek in the Bible is important theologically. It lends strong support for the notion that knowledge of the true God possessed by Noah and his sons did not die out."²⁶

Altar-nate Ending? This raises another question from Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek. What religion did Abram practice? Melchizedek had a relationship to Yahweh, though the particulars of his religious rites are unknown. Abraham wasn't Jewish, and so it's ironic that Higgins believes Scripture tells us Melchizedek was of another religion—though it seems his religious tradition was not "another," but begun by God Himself—while Abraham had a confirmed relationship with the Almighty without religion ever mentioned. Ironically, Higgins's reliance on Melchizedek proves too much because his conclusion should be applied to Abraham rather than Melchizedek.

Melchizedek's encounter with Abraham is unique. It is not an application from the eighteenth century BC to the twenty-first century work among Muslims. No, the story uniquely indicates that Yahweh has been working throughout history. He called out a people for Himself through whom He would eventually send His Son as Redeemer for all those ensnared in false religions.

2 Kings 5: Naaman the Syrian

Higgins believes Naaman is the perfect picture of one who comes to faith yet remains in his religion, again paralleling what is happening with Muslims. He writes,

*Naaman clearly changes at least some of his beliefs. He now acknowledges that there is no God in all the earth except "in Israel" (v. 15). Yet, some of his old ways of thinking remain: since there is no God except in Israel, he asks for some of Israel's dirt that he might take it with him to Aram (v. 17). The Prophet allows him to remain in this belief about the connection between the dirt of Israel and the God of Israel. The process of change in an insider's belief system will be a dynamic one.*²⁷

Do We Know What We Don't Know? What really happened to Naaman? First, he made a genuine confession of faith in Yahweh: "I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (v. 15). And he simultaneously turned away from Rimmon, his former god. Second, Elisha does not comment on the notion that Naaman needed Israeli soil for worship (v. 17). To make too much of this is to argue from silence. At most, Naaman is just acknowledging that Yahweh is the only God and trying to connect to Him as best he can within his own unbelieving culture. In fact, his actions imply that his own culture is hopelessly corrupted by false religion, but he, Naaman, will remain true to the only living God. Third, Naaman asks about the necessity of accompanying his master when the latter worships the god Rimmon (v. 18). This implies that while his master bows, Naaman would help him worship while Naaman refrains. Fourth, Elisha said, "Go in peace" (v. 19). While this certainly was not a condemnation of what Naaman was going to do, it is an acknowledgement that Naaman's tender conscience is bruised by his duty to his king and that he does not need the added guilt.

The Nature of the Request. What was the nature of Naaman's request? Was it: "Elisha, when I am in the temple of Rimmon with my master, is it all right that I bow in worship to Rimmon as my master bows?" If this were the nature of the question, why did he ask forgiveness? Timothy Tennent concisely speaks to this point: "The one thing we *do* know is that the context of the passage is about Naaman asking for *forgiveness* for doing something which they both knew was wrong, not the Prophet's *blessing* for promoting any activity or strategy or self-identity of Naaman as a follower of Rimmon."²⁸

The key is that both Elisha and Naaman knew that worshipping Rimmon was wrong. How is this parallel to what is happening to followers of Jesus who stay inside Islam? These insiders believe they are doing something right, even noble. For instance, Mazhar Mallouhi writes, "I was born into a confessional home. Islam is the blanket with which my mother wrapped me up when she nursed me and sang to me and prayed over me. I imbibed aspects of Islam with my mother's milk. I inherited Islam from my parents and it was the cradle which held me until I found Christ. Islam is my mother. You don't engage a person by telling them their mother is ugly."²⁹ I agree with Mallouhi that the worst way to begin a relationship with a Muslim is to call his "mother" ugly. But if Mallouhi were to ask me what I think about his mother, I'd encourage him this way: "You have new parents. You have been adopted into a new family because your

mother has disowned you. You now have a Father! And he loves you enough to call you his son. Did your mother ever call you son or were you just her slave?"

Shh! Silence Is Arguing. Whereas Naaman knew he should no longer go to Rimmon's temple, his occupation required him to. This is in no way parallel to the insider position. Naaman had to do something that would appear to observers as worship, so he appealed for forgiveness, not blessing. Insiders, IM proponents tell us, are not compelled to remain inside Islam and they are doing nothing wrong by doing so.

Naaman's story does not justify the IM. There is too much divergence; there are no parallels to the Muslim context. Indeed, there is nothing in the Bible that supports insider movements. Likewise, God's prohibition against worshipping other gods is the main context of the Old and New Testaments.³⁰

SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH A MUSLIM

If Christians are properly prepared, Chrislam and IM don't have to happen. Missionaries grounded in Scripture will probably not make the same mistakes the proponents of IM have made. Additionally, converting to Christianity and identifying as *Christians* in the visible church is the most frequent and successful way Muslims have come to know Jesus today, not a different way.

Prepare for Spiritual Warfare

Dealing with Islam puts Christians in the center of a fierce spiritual battle. Evil spiritual forces hold captive more souls in Islam than any other religion. Paul tells us, "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Islam denies essential Christian doctrines, exalting itself against the knowledge of the true God. Christians wage war against Islam with spiritual weapons. These weapons are love and learning, knowledge, ideas, thoughts, and arguments. Make Jesus Lord of your life (1 Pet. 3:15).

Don't Fear Suffering

The New Testament was written *by* suffering Christians, *to* suffering Christians, *for* suffering Christians. "All who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). But the Qur'an says: "I will instill terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them" (Q8:12).³¹ The good news is that God has prepared for every believer a reward that cannot be imagined (1 Cor. 2:9). Therefore, you will be ineffective with Muslims if comfort concerns you more than sharing the gospel.

Study Your Christian Faith

“Study to show yourself approved to God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). We must know God and His Son, Jesus. The more you study Scripture, the more you will be anchored in the truth.

Learn about Islam

Study Islam’s early origins so you can counter the idyllic way Muslims present it. The more you learn about Islam, the early days of the Qur’an’s collection, Muhammad’s life, and Islam’s military conquests, the more effective will be your questions to Muslims who generally don’t know this history.

Above all else: love Jesus, live the gospel, proclaim the kingdom, and love Muslims.

Joshua Lingel is the founding president of i2 Ministries. He leads training in Muslim Ministry and Islamic Studies for some of the largest Christian networks of churches in Asia, Africa, and South America. The Mission Muslim World University church-based training program developed by i2 Ministries includes thirty-five courses in Muslim Ministry and Islamic Studies and is available at www.i2ministries.org or e-mail: info@i2ministries.org.

Bill Nikides is a minister in the International Presbyterian Church and works with i2 Ministries in Insider Movement publications and Southeast Asia ministry. He is co-editor of the i2 Ministries book *Chrislam: How Missionaries Are Promoting an Islamized Gospel* and director of the new i2 Ministries movie called Half Devil/ Half Child at www.halfdevilhalfchild.com.

NOTES

- 1 The authors would like to thank Abdu Murray and Adam Simnovitz for their editorial advice.
- 2 This refers to a “distinctive practice of spiritual running which members liken to Joshua’s army that took Jericho, or the Muslim practice of walking around the Ka’aba.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chrislam>.)
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 <http://www.acommonword.com/>.
- 5 H. L. Richard, “Unpacking the Insider Paradigm: An Open Discussion on Points of Diversity,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 26, 4 (2009): 176.
- 6 Jesus in the Qur’an Conferences/Workbook, 2008 ed., 36. Thanks to Adam Simnowitz for this
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 For example, on S. 4:171 Ibn Kathir writes: “The Christians exaggerated over `Isa until they elevated him above the grade that Allah gave him. They elevated him from the rank of Prophethood to being a god, whom they worshipped just as they worshipped Allah.” And again: “The Christians, may Allah curse them, have no limit to their disbelief because of their ignorance, so their deviant statements and their misguidance grows. Some of them believe that `Isa is Allah, some believe that he is one in a trinity and some believe that he is the son of Allah. Their beliefs and creeds are numerous and contradict each other, prompting some people to say that if ten Christians meet, they would end up with eleven sects!” (See http://www.answering-christianity.com/sami_zaatari/is_isa_god_in_islam.htm.)

- 9 Cf. Adam Simnowitz, "How Insider Movements Affect Ministry: Personal Reflections," in *Chrislam: How Missionaries Are Promoting an Islamized Gospel*, ed. Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton, and Bill Nikides (Garden Grove, CA: i2 Ministries Press. 2011), 221–26. Copies of *Chrislam* can be obtained at: www.i2ministries.org.
- 10 Surah 4:157.
- 11 Surah 5:73.
- 12 Surah 4:171. Jesus will come as a ruler, break the cross, kill the pigs, and stop jizya (the Islamic tax) (Bukhari 3:656); Jesus will force people to convert to Islam (Bukhari 3:656); Jesus talked in a cradle (Bukhari 6:236); Jesus returns and kills Dajjal (Muslim equivalent of the Antichrist), fights Gog and Magog (Muslim 4:7015); descends in Damascus (Muslim 4:7015); people go to hell for associating divinity with Jesus (Muslim 4:6733).
- 13 Kevin Higgins, *Muhammad, Islam and the Qur'an* (unpublished paper), 1–23.
- 14 Cf. Jay Smith, "An Assessment of IM's Principle Paradigms," in *Chrislam*, Lingel et al., 278–96.
- 15 The names of individuals and organizations they represent were left out.
- 16 A Muslim-friendly translation, sometimes called "Muslim-compliant" or "Muslim idiom" translation, uses Islamic names and Arabic words or phrases for the sake of encouraging Muslims to read the Bible. Understanding that the idea of Jesus as the Son of God is blasphemous to Muslims, these translations might render *son* in a nonliteral manner, thus removing the perceived offense; cf. Joshua Lingel, "Islamizing the Bible: Insider Movements and Scripture Translations," in *Chrislam*, Lingel et al., 156–72.
- 17 All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.
- 18 See Simnowitz, "Insider Movements."
- 19 Lingel, "Islamizing the Bible," 156–72.
- 20 www.frontiers.org.
- 21 Emily Belz: "Holding Translators Accountable," <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/18687>.
- 22 Check Wikipedia, "House Church," or see <http://www.liberty.edu/index.cfm?PID=18495&MID=44096> (accessed December 15, 2011), where the number is up to eight hundred thousand.
- 23 Personal correspondence with the author.
- 24 See Bill Nikides, "Interview of a Former Insider, Anwar Hossein," in *Chrislam*, Lingel et al., 228–37.
- 25 Kevin Higgins, "Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective," *St Francis Magazine* 5, 4 (2009): 85.
- 26 Richard D. Culver, "Melchizedek," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, v. ii. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 510.
- 27 Higgins, "Inside What?" 90.
- 28 Timothy C. Tennent, "Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 High Spectrum Contextualization," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23, 3 (2006): 108.
- 29 Mazhar Mallouhi, "Comments on the Insider Movement," *St Francis Magazine* 5, 5 (2009): 8.
- 30 David Talley, "Pagan Religious Practices and Heretical Teaching: What Is to Be Our Attitude? Gleanings from the Old and New Testaments," in *Chrislam*, Lingel et al. Also, Jeff Morton, "Theology of Religions: Would Jesus Be Caught Dead Working in Islam?" in *Chrislam*, Lingel et al.
- 31 A. Yusuf `Ali translation.