Contextualization without Syncretism

by Rick Brown

Rick Brown is a Bible scholar and mission strategist. He has been involved in outreach to the Muslim world since 1977.

Biblical Worldview amidst Cultural Diversity

We use the term 'worldview' to refer to a person's framework of core beliefs and values. It has been common in the past to treat worldview as one aspect of culture, but this is unhelpful for our purposes. Different individuals in a community can share a common culture yet hold to different worldviews. For example, they might all drive on the same side of the road (culture) but have different views regarding the value of compliance with traffic laws (worldview). Except for isolated communities, it is increasingly common to find a diversity of worldviews within the ethnic groups of the world. So I will use the term 'culture' in a more limited way to refer to the shared and transmitted social conventions of an ethnic community and 'worldview' to refer to the network of core beliefs and values that some people have, whether the whole community shares them or not.

The Bible is a record of revelations intended to reform the beliefs and values of the peoples to whom they were addressed as well as those of peoples who followed them. The Biblical authors form and reform the worldview of their readers and hearers by making assertions, by narrating meaningful events, and by revealing the causes, consequences and purposes of those events. This was part of Jesus' mission as well; he said, "In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:37 NIV). In other words, one of the chief functions of the Bible is to transform the worldviews that people have and bring them into alignment with a single, revealed worldview, which the Biblical authors call "the truth". This is a theocentric (God-centered) worldview, in which the value of every person, object, and action depends on its evaluation by God and its compatibility with His program, the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

With regard to culture, however, the New Testament affirms diversity rather than uniformity. Acts 10 tells how God revealed to Peter in a vision and by

the outpouring of His Spirit that He accepts Gentiles who believe in Him. Acts 15 tells how God showed James and the Apostles, through key Scriptures and the evident work of the Holy Spirit, that Gentile believers should follow the customs of their own culture rather than adopting Jewish culture (although they would need to shun some bad practices). The result of this revelation was that church life for Greek disciples was different from church life for Jewish disciples, and each of these believer subcultures was appropriate for the culture in which it was embedded. A further result was that the cultural differences that exist between Jewish believers and other believers no longer formed a barrier preventing fellowship between them.

Paul affirmed cultural diversity in many passages.[1] He even adapted his own lifestyle[2] and preaching style[3] to fit the customs of the people to whom he was ministering. Jesus affirmed the value of every ethnic group when he said that the Gospel must be preached to every ethnic group before He returns (Matt. 24:14). The divinely orchestrated multi-language praise miracle at Pentecost (Acts 2:4–11) revealed God's acceptance of diverse languages and peoples. The heavenly praise scene in Rev. 7:9 shows that God intends to save worshippers from every different language and ethnic group. The implication is that God's Kingdom will not be complete until it includes the full diversity of peoples and languages!

In summary, then, the Bible reveals a divine program, mediated by Jesus Christ, that fosters conformity to a single, revealed, theocentric worldview while maintaining diversity of culture. This program is realized in communities of disciples who love God and follow Christ and meet together for worship and fellowship, i.e., in "churches".

I suggest that these churches are "contextualized" to the extent that (1) they conform to the worldview revealed in the Bible, and (2) honor and maintain the customs of their native culture insofar as they are compatible with the Bible.

Contextualization of Church Life within Cultures

The task of sowing and planting contextualized churches is called contextualization. In the words of Darrell Whiteman,

> Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus

Churches are contextualized to the extent that they conform to the Biblical worldview and maintain the customs of their culture

> allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture.[4]

Whiteman notes further that:

> Contextualization is not something we pursue motivated by an agenda of pragmatic efficiency. Rather, it must be followed because of our faithfulness to God, who sent God's son as a servant to die so that we all may live.[5]

Whiteman takes the incarnational ministry of Jesus as the chief mandate for contextualization. As noted above, however, the Scriptures make it clear in many places that God values cultural diversity while calling the people and communities to be transformed into the moral and mental likeness of His Son. A first step, as Whiteman notes, is for the Word to "penetrate their worldview", but it seems to me that the ultimate goal cannot be less than full alignment with the revealed worldview.

Although the Bible as a whole does not endorse any particular culture or even dictate a full set of customs (as Islam traditionally has), the Biblical worldview does inculcate particular values, and Jesus offers the power of the Holy Spirit to actualize those values in the lives of His disciples. For example, the New Testament does not dictate any particular mode of dress, but it calls for modesty. It does not dictate any particular political system, but it does call for servant leadership. It does not mandate any particular economic system, but it does condemn greed and advocate generosity. It does not dictate certain postures for prayer, but it does call for one to pray often to God.[6] It does not dictate particular forms of music and instrumentation, but it does call for one to sing praises to the Lord.

God's program, in fact, is to save and sanctify His people in the context of community, i.e., through local churches. Ideally these Christ-centered communities will develop a Biblical worldview and bring out the best in their host cultures, while shunning practices that conflict with the Bible. In this way they can achieve a contextualization of God's Kingdom in their community.

The Danger of Syncretism

The main threat to God's program of contextualization is syncretism. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (11th edn.) defines syncretism as "the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought". We can see in this definition at least two kinds of syncretism: cultural syncretism, which results from mixing elements from different cultures, and syncretistic worldview, which results from mixing elements of different worldviews. From a missiological point of view, both conditions are symptomatic of insufficient contextualization.

Cultural Syncretism

Most aspects of church life are culturally determined: the clothes people wear, the kinds of homes and buildings they erect, the way people interact socially, the relationships between the sexes, the way people sit (or stand) during meetings, the way they sing, the instruments they use, the role of

literacy, the way they transmit skills and information, and their conventions of music, poetry, song, and art. So if a form of church life is imported or imposed from outside, then this can lead to cultural syncretism in the church, because it disfigures the host culture by replacing parts of it with elements of a foreign culture. For example, church leaders might lead people to wear foreign clothing, use foreign music, eat in a foreign way, and even use a foreign language. This is especially likely if the leaders are themselves foreigners or have been trained in a foreign country or in a foreign institution.

From a pragmatic perspective, the local church's adoption of alien customs makes it appear to the host community to be a foreign intrusion or even a threat to their culture. It seems to them that the church does not belong to the community, and members of the community may feel they should not belong to the church. Such churches may appeal to people who dislike their culture and want something foreign, but they have little impact on the main community. In fact, the community may view members of such churches as outcasts who have rejected their own people and culture.

Many are the Muslim seekers, for example, who have visited an alien church with sincere openness yet have left in disgust because of the cultural syncretism: the people were wearing shoes in the sanctuary and sitting on chairs and benches as if it were a tavern; their Bibles were on the floor; the women were uncovered and mixed among the men; they prayed without kneeling or lifting hands; and they sang "pop" songs with western melodies, often with foreign lyrics. (The first-century Jewish Christians might have been surprised as well, because their customs of worship were more like those of Muslims.) So syncretistic church culture can put a stumbling block in the way of many seekers.

A second problem with cultural syncretism is that the use of alien lifestyles and languages in the church

*H*e answered that Muslims did not merely need to be converted to Christ, they needed to be converted to a superior culture.

encourages people to compartmentalize their life and worldview. As a result, when they are at church meetings, they think and act like foreign Christians, but when they are elsewhere in the host community, they think and act like the others. Thus the adoption of foreign or syncretistic culture in the church can lead to double-mindedness and syncretistic worldview. As Whiteman puts it,

> When we fail to contextualize, we run a much greater risk of establishing weak churches, whose members will turn to non-Christian syncretistic explanations, follow nonbiblical lifestyles, and engage in magical rituals.[7]

The main problem, however, with noncontextualization is theological in nature rather than methodological: the adoption of foreign customs into the local church denigrates and disfigures cultures which God wants to redeem and have represented in His Kingdom. Foreignizing approaches are not missiologically sound, because they reject part of God's mission.

Avoiding Noncontextualization

The solution to noncontextualization is to (1) understand and reject its unbiblical philosophical foundations, (2) understand and reject its psychological foundations, (3) identify and overcome other obstacles to contextualization, and (4) let Jesus be Lord of the local church, i.e., let the leaders of the local church look to Jesus to build and guide their church in accord with His will for them rather than following church patterns from other cultures. Hiebert discusses (1) and (4) quite thoroughly in his well-known article "Critical Contextualization," and there is no need to repeat here what he says there.[8]

In regard to point (2), the psychological causes, Hiebert repeatedly mentions ethnocentricity as a problem. It seems to me, however, that there are two kinds of ethnocentricity. One stems from naïveté. Cross-cul-

tural missionaries, their leaders and their supporters may not understand or appreciate the local culture, or they may naively assume that their way of doing things is the only way to do them. The local believers can also be naïve and assume that the way presented by the missionaries is the one and only right way. This can happen even if the missionaries are from another ethnic group in the same country. The second form of ethnocentricity stems from denominational pride and ethnic prejudice; people assume that their way is superior to all others and are closed-minded to diversity. Some even seek to justify this by saying that church life should be uniform throughout the world, but what they mean is that everyone else should do church they way they do. Their comfort zone is threatened by diversity and by the uncertainty of seeking God's will for the local church, and so they cling to traditionalism.

As for (3), other obstacles, Whiteman mentions denominationalism; in particular he cites the expectations of supporting churches and mission executives that churches planted in the field will be just like those at home, and that the pagans will be converted to become just like them.[9] This ethnic pride and prejudice is as likely to characterize national denominations as foreign ones. The bishop of a traditional Christian church in a predominantly Muslim country was asked why he was opposed to contextualized approaches to church-planting among Muslims. He answered that Muslims did not merely need to be converted to Christ, they needed to be converted to a superior culture. By this he meant the subculture of his own community of traditional Christians. Few Muslims have converted under the bishop's conditions, yet those remain the conditions under which he will accept them. Elsewhere I have found traditional Christians refusing to accept Muslims

who come to faith in Christ unless they first disavow their former culture and adopt the culture and language of the Christian community. Their bitterness towards Muslims is such that they will accept them only if their lives say, in effect, "Everything about us is bad, and everything we did was wrong. Everything you do is right, and we want to be your disciples." Obviously this approach owes more to ethnicity than to missiology, and more to pride and disdain than to love and respect. It does not work very well.

The second obstacle mentioned by Whiteman is resistance on the part of local church leaders who have been trained by outsiders to do church the way it is done in another culture. Since that way is the only one they know, they can feel threatened if it is questioned. From what I have seen, however, what concerns the leaders of some local churches and denominations is to do church in a way that pleases the outside churches and missions which fund them. Hiebert notes this problem as well and calls it "ecclesiastical hegemony."[10]

Syncretistic worldview

Although the Bible does not endorse any particular culture, it does challenge the worldviews which people hold. It does this by revealing one specific worldview as "the truth" and "the light" and by exposing contrary viewpoints as "darkness". The term 'light' is quite appropriate. Just as light dispels darkness, so the truth of God's Word can reform the false beliefs and unfelicitous values that pervert all human worldviews to some extent. The result of this reforming process is that some people in the ethnic group become disciples of Jesus and form church communities with transformed subcultures. Ideally the worldviews of these disciples will be transformed into perfect harmony with the Bible; they would incorporate all of the values and beliefs taught in the Bible and would have eliminated any traditional values and beliefs that conflict with the Bible. Then the disciples would truly be "the light of the world" (Matt 5:14). In reality, however,

there are no Christian denominations that are in perfect harmony with the Biblical worldview; all have syncretistic worldviews to some extent.[11] Except for people with views like John Piper, almost all "Christian" worldviews are anthropocentric rather than theocentric. Looking at the American church from a missiological perspective, Lesslie Newbigin showed that it was poorly contextualized and excessively syncretistic.[12] By this he meant that American Christians had adopted many elements of the "pagan" worldviews that dominate their society.

> *Lesslie Newbigin showed that [the American church] was poorly contextualized and excessively syncretistic.*
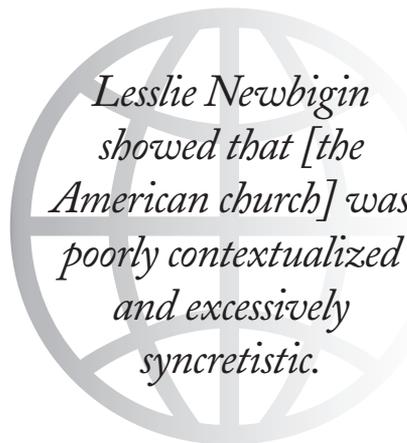
God, however, has given us the Bible and His Spirit to transform our hearts and minds. When believers immerse themselves in the Bible and receive good discipling, they grow in their understanding and acceptance of the Biblical worldview. So even though they may start off with a worldview that is dissonant with the Bible, their worldview becomes progressively more Biblical as they are nurtured with quality Biblical input. The Bible, however, is not the only influence on people's spiritual lives. In most traditional Christian subcultures, the dominant influence is tradition, and the Bible is used primarily as a source of proof-texts selected to support traditional beliefs and practices. So if new believers are discipled by members of a traditional Christian subculture and incorporated into their community, then they are likely to assimilate to the traditional values and beliefs of that community, even those that differ from the Bible. If that Christian subculture

is culturally syncretistic, then this assimilation may result in extraction and reduced effectiveness in witnessing to the host community. On the other hand, if new believers do not get adequate Biblical input to their lives, and if the influence of non-Christian worldview remains high, then their worldview will not be adequately reformed and they will end up with a syncretistic worldview.[13]

Contextualization of Biblical Worldview in Muslim Cultures: C6, C5, C4

We can observe these processes in traditionally Muslim communities. Some Muslims are already dissidents or outcasts in their community, and they want something really different. So they gravitate to C2 and C3 churches (i.e., to churches with foreign customs).[14] Most Muslims, however, are loyal to their family and community. When they study the Gospels, experience a confirming event, and come to faith in Jesus Christ, they may start out as secret believers (C6) or form a house church with other disciples (C5). Some (but not all) of these believers begin in a state we could call C5.5. By this I mean that their culture and worldview have not changed very much. But as they study God's Word under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, they make adjustments to their values, beliefs, and practices. This process leads them towards a reformed worldview, what John Travis calls "C5", in which "aspects of Islamic theology which are incompatible with the Bible are rejected, or reinterpreted if possible."[15] John Travis calls them "Messianic Muslims". They continue to observe their native cultural conventions, such as dressing in normal garb, avoiding pork, observing feasts, using traditional greetings, treating the Scriptures with great respect, lifting hands in prayer, etc. If they were nominal Muslims previously, then they continue as nominal Muslims, but ones who follow Jesus while remaining members of their Muslim cultural community. If they were pious Muslims who went to the mosque to pray, then they might continue to do so, albeit with a hope of sharing their

spiritual journey with others. (Some Messianic Muslims make frequent pilgrimages to Mecca so they can share the Good News with other pilgrims they meet there.)

With time, however, some of these believers may wish to set themselves apart from the host community and no longer call themselves Muslims, or they might be pressured to do so. Thus their fellowships become what Travis calls "C4". He writes that "C4 believers, though highly contextualized, are usually not seen as Muslim by the Muslim community. C4 believers identify themselves as followers of Isa the Messiah (or something similar)." Whereas the Muslim community views C5 believers as odd members of the community, because they study the Bible and follow Jesus, they view C4 believers as stepping outside of the community. They see members of C3 and C2 churches, however, as renegades who have rejected their community, because they refuse to observe customs that are normative in Muslim cultures. For example, C3 and C2 Christians do not observe Ramadan or the Feast that commemorates Abraham's offering of his son. This rejection of cultural norms can make C3 believers pariahs and outcasts from their community. They are like the Jehovah's Witnesses who refuse to celebrate Christmas because it is not mandated in the Bible, or Wahhabis who refuse to use toothbrushes because their prophet did not use them. As for C2, it is more culturally syncretistic than C3, because it imports alien customs typical of church life in another culture.

It is evident that C5 and C4 churches are more contextualized than C3 and C2. The main difference between C6 and C5 is that C6 believers keep their faith in Christ a secret, whereas C5 believers make their faith known, meet together for Bible study, prayer, praise, and fellowship, and invite seekers to join them. C5 fellowships multiply, whereas most C6 believers have little impact on their community. If a goal of mission is to foster and support church-planting movements, then C5 is obviously better than C6.

*T*his objection could also be raised against traditional Christians who treat extrabiblical works as divinely authoritative.

It is also evident that C5 fellowships are more contextualized than C4. There are problems, however, with C5. In most Muslim communities, even nominal Muslims cannot maintain a Muslim identity unless they are willing to say the Muslim Confession of Faith: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger." This confession is usually understood to entail an affirmation of the Qur'an as well. In other words, one is allowed to be a nominal, cultural Muslim as long as one does not deny the Confession of Faith. Nominal Muslims say it if required to do so, as do C5 (and C6) disciples. Some critics say that disciples of Christ should not affirm anything besides the Bible as Scripture. It should be noted, however, that this objection could be raised against traditional Christians who treat extrabiblical works as divinely authoritative. Examples include the "apocryphal" books accepted by the historic churches, the historical creeds, denominational creeds, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and even the US Constitution (which some American Christians treat as inspired and inerrant).

More significant, however, is the concern that affirming the Quran could lead C5 disciples to retain Quranic viewpoints that conflict with the Bible, resulting in syncretistic worldview. This is particularly a risk if pastors and teachers were to teach the Quran and other Islamic works.[16] Parshall rightly notes the danger of syncretistic worldview that could arise from believing both the Bible and the Qur'an.[17] Travis, however, notes that the statistics which Parshall cited did not establish that the C5 believers in question were actually studying the Qur'an in a language they understood, and he notes guidelines by which C5 movements can avoid syncretism.[18] It might be borne in mind that Messianic teachers cannot for long uphold two books with conflicting

worldviews. They must either reinterpret the Quran to be consistent with the Bible, as a few have done, or limit their usage of it to texts which support Biblical teachings, or simply ignore it.

One statistic that is often quoted from Parshall's article is that "45 percent [of Messianic Muslims in one location] do not affirm God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." This statistic reflects a deficiency, I believe, in both the design and interpretation of the survey. The design of the survey was such that it reflects, not the faith of C5 believers, but their assimilation to traditional western Christianity and its ways of talking about God. It did not ask them about their belief in the Trinity or about their concept of God. It asked if they think of God using the exact terms 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit', as in Matthew 28:19.

Nevertheless, some critics of C5 movements have expressed alarm that only 55% of the Messianic Muslims said that they think of God in terms of being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is reason, however, to be astonished that it is so high. Out of 60+ Trinitarian passages in the NT, Matthew 28:19 is the only one that uses this exact formula. As for the C5 believers, they usually call Jesus "Lord" and "Christ" much more than "Son", because the Muslim community grossly misunderstands the Hebrew sonship terminology. So the Messianic Muslims speak of the persons of the Trinity in the manner common in the rest of the NT, namely "God", "Christ"/"Lord", and "(Holy) Spirit". This is the pattern found in the creedal statement in Eph. 4:4-6 (cf. 1 Cor 8:6) and the benediction in 2 Cor 13:14, and it is the pattern which underlies the Nicene Creed ("One God...one Lord...one Spirit..."). So asking Messianic Muslims if they think of God as "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" does not test their knowledge of Scripture, or even their belief

in the Trinity, but rather tests their assimilation to ecclesiastical traditions. In fact, the same survey showed that 66% of the Messianic Muslims are reading the Gospels every day, which is a far higher rate than most traditional Christians, and so their ways of talking about God are shaped more by Scripture than by ecclesiastical tradition.[19]

Nevertheless, in face of the risk that C5 contextualization could lead to syncretism, C4 does seem safer. There are problems, however, with C4 identity. If Muslim disciples refuse to say the Confession of Faith, then they are generally considered apostates from Islam and traitors to the Muslim community. Many Muslims believe that this apostasy brings shame and divine wrath upon the community and in particular upon the relatives of the apostates. As a result, they can be very angry at the apostates who caused this danger and disgrace. Their desperate attempts to save themselves from social contempt and the prospect of hellfire can lead them to exert every pressure upon the apostates, including seizure of their spouses, children and properties, annulment of their marriages, expulsion from jobs, homes, family and community, imprisonment, and beatings. If those fail, then they may wash away their shame by shedding the blood of the apostates. As for the apostates, their witness is often scorned and rejected, especially if their relatives feel that the apostate has caused them to be rejected by God and society. They may have to flee their family and community, resulting in extraction and a loss of ongoing witness. When missionaries tell disciples of Christ that they must apostatize from Islam, they often end up having to help the believers flee the wrath of their angry relatives. As for the community, it often becomes more determined than ever to protect itself from influences which could lead others to apostatize. So where before they were tolerant of the Bible and even Bible studies, now they are careful to ensure that no one has a copy.

The level of religious toleration in some nominally Muslim families and communities is high enough that C4 apostates are not driven out, but in many others it is not possible for C4 believers to remain in the community, and they are forced to extract themselves. In such communities C4 contextualization is not a feasible way to foster church-planting movements.

Messianic Cultural Muslims

Biblical Christianity is a worldview but not a culture. The term 'Muslim', however, can be used to describe communities and cultures as well as religions. Just as there are ethnic Jews, religious Jews, and a whole range of Messianic Jews, so there are cultural Muslims, religious Muslims, and a whole range of Messianic Muslims. Travis used the term 'C5' to refer to the full range of Messianic Muslim fellowships, whether they were Muslim in culture alone or had Muslim religious practices. In the debate among Massey, Parshall, and Tennent, however, the term 'C5' has been used to focus on Messianic Religious Muslims[20] (although the term 'insider movement' is better for that[21]). Yet most Messianic Muslims are cultural Muslims, and if they utter the Confession, they do so in compliance with legal requirements and social conventions. Here are two examples:

In one country a Messianic Muslim evangelist was taken to court and accused of apostasy. He testified that he was a Muslim who followed Jesus and that he encouraged others likewise. The judge told him to say the Confession of Faith and he did so. The judge then asked him to explain what he meant by this Confession. The man answered by saying that at one time there was no Arab nation. There were just tribes who fought and raided one another and worshipped many idols. Then God in His mercy sent Muhammad to lead the Arabs from polytheism to monotheism and from tribal disunity to political unity. The judge accepted this explanation and acquitted him.

In another case, in a country where saying the Confession of Faith is a legal requirement for all citizens, the leader of a house church was arrested and told to say the Confession or d He said it, but he reminded the police of two Islamic teachings regarding the Confession of Faith: (1) saying the Confession is valid only if the person says it with sincerity (*niya*), and (2) only God knows if a person says it with sincerity. The police realized the man was letting them know that he said the Confession with insincerity, but they could not execute him. So they beat him and let him go. As a result of his wise response, he was able to stay alive, continue living in the community, and continue his ministry among them.

The actions of these two men are not unusual. They follow a long-standing custom in Muslim societies, namely that everyone has to give lip-service to the Confession of Faith whether they believe it or not. There are no statistics for the percentage of nominal Muslims in Muslim communities, but it is clearly high in many places, yet all of them have to give lip-service to the Confession. When nominal Muslims come to faith in Jesus Christ they may carry on with this practice, especially if the alternative is death or exile. This has always been the case with secret believers (C6), but secret believers have very limited witness, whereas C5 believers are open witnesses to their faith. They hold meetings in their homes for Bible study and fellowship, and they invite friends and relatives to join them. Some of these Bible study fellowships have multiplied at amazing rates. But this is not generally possible if the disciples are secret believers or apostates.

Most Muslim communities have a remarkable degree of toleration for disciples of Jesus who remain loyal to their community as cultural Muslims. Although nominal Muslims do not practice Islamic religion, neither do they publicly reject Islam, with all its history, civilization and culture, and hence they do not shame the community or bring misfortune upon it. As a result, Muslim communities are less defensive about Messianic Muslims, more receptive to invitations to study the Bible with them, and more open to their testimonies about the Lord Jesus. This is contextualization, not syncretism.

Summary

Parshall and Tennent (this issue) define syncretism as the high end of a single parameter of contextualization. I hope to have shown, however, that these are two different parameters. Syncretism (as commonly understood) is a parameter of worldview, whereas contextualization is a parameter of enculturation. (Cf. Lewis, p. 126.) The C1 to C6 communities differ in their degree of enculturation, yet each of them could have any degree of syncretistic worldview. The ideal is for all of them to have a Biblical worldview. I have also argued that the foreignization of church life leads to syncretistic subcultures and that this is inconsistent with God's program to redeem every ethnic group. So contextualization is a goal rather than a strategy. With regard to contextualization of church life in Muslim cultures, I have argued that in many or most Muslim communities it is not possible to have open, C4 fellowships, and I have argued that Messianic Muslim fellowships are more feasible and more effective. They are brave, well–contextualized, open in their testimony, effective in outreach, and capable of multiplying rapidly. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11 ESV). See also Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 5:6.

[2] 1 Cor. 9:20–23. "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some" (v. 22 ESV).

[3] In Acts 22:3 and 23:4, Paul begins his message by identifying with the religious Jews and in particular with the Pharisees, and in general he begins his preaching to Jews by quoting OT prophecies. But when he preaches to Greeks at the Areopagus in Athens, he affirms that God created all nations from one man and calls all to seek Him (Acts 17:26–27), then quotes relevant passages from two Greek poets (vs. 28).

[4] Whiteman, Darrell, 'Contextualization: The Theory, The Gap, The Challenge', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 21/1 (January 1997), 2–7.

[5] *ibid.*

[6] There are Scriptures that endorse kneeling, bowing to the ground, and raising hands in prayer, such as Psalm 95:6: "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker" (NIV) and Psalm 134:2: "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD" (NIV). The Bible provides several models of prayer posture but does not say they are necessary in order for prayers to be effective.

[7] *ibid.*

[8] See Paul G. Hiebert, 'Critical Contextualization', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 11/3 (July 1987), 104–112.

[9] *op. cit.* One of the ironies is that many western church practices have their origins in pagan culture, as Frank Viola has shown in *Pagan Christianity: The Origins of Our Modern Church Practices* (Gainesville: Present Testimony Ministry, 2002). This does not in itself make the practices contrary to the Bible, but it does make it ludicrous to impose them onto churches in other cultures.

[10] *op. cit.*

[11] Some western Christian denominations, for example, forbid wine while ignoring gluttony, forbid polygamy but approve no-fault divorce, forbid movies or music or guitars or work on Sundays but accept greed and materialistic values. They hold loyalty to king or country to be as important as loyalty to Jesus. They affirm Jesus as a sacrifice but ignore his ongoing role as Savior and Lord of all. They hope for heaven but live for this life, resisting sanctification. They honor the Bible but rarely read it; the real authority being traditional church teachings and practices. Their views of the world to come owe more to Greco-Roman worldview than to Biblical exegesis. The Bible calls the church to be a family and a community, but they practice individualism and Sunday ritualism. The Bible calls them to confront injustice, preach righteousness, and proclaim truth, but they make religion a private matter.

[12] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). Newbigin focuses on syncretism that results from accepting a "modern scientific worldview" that religion is a private matter separate from public life, that science is the only publicly acceptable way to discover truth, that values must be kept separate from science and truth, and that the chief value is anthropocentric: WIIFM (what's in it for me).

[13] It should be noted, however, that some forms of syncretism are more harmful than others, simply because some elements of the Biblical worldview are more critical to salvation and Kingdom growth than are others. For example, it is more detrimental to salvation to deny that Jesus is Lord and Savior (like liberals and Muslims do) than it is to deny the Trinity (like Jesus-only Protestants do). It is more detrimental for spiritual growth to reject the divine authority of the Bible than it is to attribute divine authority to both the Bible and to additional writings. So in evaluating the dangers of syncretism, we need to recognize these differences in gravity. In the case of Muslim communities, it may be better to have Messianic Muslim movements that promote the Bible, Biblical doctrine, and the Gospel of Christ alongside respect for the Quran than to have no movement at all.

[14] For an explanation of C1 to C6, see John Travis, 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 34/4 (1998), 407–408, or John Travis, 'Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa', *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 17/1 (2000), 53–59 and chart on p. 5.

[15] John Travis, 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum.'

[16] This seems to be an implication of Joshua Massey's articles: 'His Ways are not Our Ways', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 35/2 (1999), and 'Misunderstanding C5: His Ways are not Our Orthodoxy', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 40/3 (2004). Certainly this is the assumption of critics of C5 contextualization, who use the term 'C5' almost exclusively for the extreme end of the C5 range. See Phil Parshall, 'Danger! New Directions in Contextualization', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 34/4 (1998), 404–406, 409–410; 'Lifting the Fatwa', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 40/3 (2004), 288–293.

[17] Phil Parshall, 'Danger! New Directions in Contextualization'.

[18] Travis, John, 'Must All Muslims Leave Islam to Follow Jesus?' *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 34/4 (1998).

[19] A scholarly or scientific survey would have delved deeper into how people thought about God. It would also have tested a control group and compared results. For example, it could have asked all these questions of traditional Christians in that country and also in the West. What is their concept of God? What is the Trinity? In what way is Jesus God? What does it mean to them to say that Jesus is God's son? How often do they read the Bible? What kinds of persecution have they endured for their faith? I think the Muslim disciples of Jesus would have outdone the traditional Christians in most categories, including the Trinity.

[20] *op. cit.*

[21] As in Gary Corwin, 'Connecting the Post-Modern Dots', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 42/2 (2006).