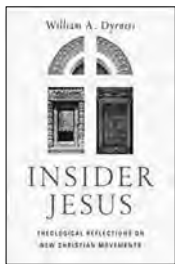


Book Reviews

Insider Jesus: Theological Reflections on New Christian Movements, by William A. Dyrness (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016, pp. 165 + ix)

—Reviewed by Darren Duerksen



Insider movements have sometimes been used as examples of what missionaries and missiologists call “contextualization.” However, there have also been those who, in looking at these movements and other new realities of mission have sounded the need to move “beyond contextualization” in our thinking.¹ Dyrness’ book *Insider Jesus* is a welcome addition seeking to advance the conversation regarding contextual understandings of the gospel, particularly as it relates to insider movements.

As a brief background, many readers will be familiar with Dyrness’ contributions to contextual theology. Two of his early works on the topic, *Learning about Theology from the Third World* (1990) and *Invitation to Cross-Cultural Theology* (1992), continue to appear on seminary recommended reading lists. They also established Dyrness as a sympathetic and attentive theological interpreter of Christianity in various cultural settings. In subsequent work Dyrness has offered important critiques of missions (*Changing the Mind of Missions*) and developed a theology of aesthetics (*Poetic Theology*), as well as a theology of religious aesthetics (*Senses of Devotion*). With *Insider Jesus* Dyrness again turns his focus to global theology with the added insights provided by his ongoing work in theological hermeneutics, religion, culture, and missiology.

Contextualization as a concept has been defined and critiqued in numerous ways. In my estimation perhaps one of its strengths was to provide missiologists with some conceptual frameworks with which to critique colonial mission postures towards culture. Some of this critique is still sorely needed, but for others this is no longer the crucial debate. Because the questions and debates have necessarily shifted over time, an understanding of “contextualization” as a concept has had to shift as well. There is a sense among some, myself included, that perhaps “contextualization” is now being asked to do conceptual work it is no longer adequate

to handle. In a similar way, Dyrness begins *Insider Jesus* in chapter 1 by acknowledging that contextualization has been a helpful framework in some ways, but falls short of being able to explain or analyze Christ movements among other religious communities. The main fault, he claims, is that contextualization “does not adequately capture the hermeneutical and dialogical character of mission whereby various accounts of God’s presence (or that of the gods or spirits) are exchanged and evaluated” (4). It is this principle question—how God works in culture and its religions—that he seeks to answer.

Western Protestants and Evangelicals have often been open to the idea of God at work in other cultures. Don Richardson’s “redemptive analogies,” for example, helped some Christians entertain the possibility that God was at work in other cultures. However, these have often viewed cultures (though not usually their religions) as simply conduits for the gospel. Dyrness continues his argument in chapter 2 by challenging this way of viewing God’s work in culture and religions. He does this first by theologically defining culture and religion. Culture he says, is “all that we humans make of God’s good creation” (36). Similarly, religions are peoples’ response (however imperfect or misguided) to the call of the biblical God. Though each of these are primarily human activity, at the same time God is everywhere active and present in these activities “calling by the Spirit those who will worship him” (36).

Dyrness also sketches a theological view of God’s intent for cultures and religions. The grand sweep of the biblical narrative is often characterized, as many of us know, by the progression of creation-fall-redemption. Dyrness reanalyzes parts of the narrative and contends that such a view obscures a key part of God’s work: re-creation. In light of this he proposes the progression of creation-disobedience-re-creation. And, of course, it is the work of re-creation that holds the keys for our understanding of cultures and religions. For this would mean that God’s project is not to replace (or even “redeem”) a culture or religion, but to re-create or renew them. This means that the whole created order was and is being brought to a new place “where the goods of culture (and religion) are given fresh valuation” (34). Thus, to come back to the concept of “contextualization,” if God is already at work in re-creating and renewing, then perhaps contextualization is asking the wrong question. Rather than seeking to understand how to place the gospel in a culture, we should ask what our response should be, in the light of Scripture, to what God is already doing.

But, as we’ve mentioned, Christians have normally been more willing to see God at work in culture than in religion.

Contextualization has been a helpful framework in some ways, but falls short of being able to explain or analyze Christ movements among other religious communities.

Because of this Dyrness makes a special focus on religion in the biblical narrative (chapter 3). In this chapter, Dyrness analyzes ways in which God used and renewed existing religious practices and understandings throughout the biblical narrative. Select examples from Israel, Jesus, and Paul demonstrate that, at least in the initial stages, God's renewal always "accommodated itself to the religious realities on the ground" while also challenging aspects of those realities that were contrary to his purposes (62). But this is not to glorify religion, for it cannot offer salvation, and can even be an obstacle to embracing God's salvation.

However, the larger point is that religions can also be a witness to God's work, point people towards his salvation, and help them understand the gospel in the logics and values of their own religious traditions. It is this latter point that could be the most troubling for some Christians. But Dyrness' discussion of scriptural examples shows that a people's cultural context, including their religious beliefs and practices, always provided for them the means by which they understood God. Dyrness refers to this as "hermeneutical spaces." Religions and cultures are "spaces" by which people have always, even in the biblical narrative, interpreted and made sense of God's work amongst them.

With this theological framework established, Dyrness in chapter 4 briefly examines several case studies of insider movements in Latin America, Africa, India, Philippines, and among southeast Asian Buddhist communities. Though diverse in location, religion, culture, and time, each of these share some common characteristics, including a focus on Christ, the centrality of the Bible, and a desire to differentiate themselves from other Christians and Christian churches. The reasons for the latter vary by location, but often revolve around a desire to make Christ-following less "foreign" and more authentic to them and their context. All of these movements also share the use of "local hermeneutical tools" (quoting E. Acoba, 97), or aspects of their religious heritage, to understand Christ, and the Bible.

But what are the implications of this for our understanding of mission and the Christian faith? It is here (chapters 5 and 6) that Dyrness makes some of the more important contributions of the book. In terms of mission, Dyrness again argues that Christians (particularly Western, Protestant Christians) should see religions as "places where people are working out the possible meaning of God's

presence there" (104). If this is the case, perhaps the goal of mission is not to displace other religions, but to help people incorporate the stories and practices of their longings, spirits, traditions, values, etc. into that of the Christian gospel. However, though mission should, even must, value peoples' religions and what the existing work of the Holy Spirit is within them, religions are not a privileged space. Religions do not save people, and the gospel certainly counters certain religious beliefs and practices. In the end, as Dyrness says, "the goal of God's work is not a perfect religion, nor merely a functioning church, but a new heaven and earth where righteousness reigns" (130).

All of this has implications for the project of mission, particularly amongst other religions. But it should also help Western Christians better understand our own lived Christian faith. As Dyrness observes in his final chapter, the idea of "hermeneutical spaces" in the Bible and insider movements should prompt Western Christians to see more clearly how our own faith has been profoundly shaped by our own prior cultural, philosophical, and religious interactions. This, as Dyrness notes periodically throughout the book, does not mean that Western Christianity has the Christian faith completely wrong; only that we don't have it completely. Our Christian faith is a particularized faith. It has been shaped by and interpreted through past and present hermeneutical lenses, and because of this it speaks to many of our past and current realities. And, just as Plato, Aristotle, the Enlightenment, and many other influences have helped Western Christians interpret Christ and his work in ways relevant to our contexts, could not and should not the traditions of other religions also help Christ-followers in those places interpret and shape a Christian faith that is relevant to theirs? Dyrness' book provides a compelling argument that such should be the case.

Endnotes

¹ See, for example, R. Daniel Shaw, "Beyond Contextualization: Toward a Twenty-First-Century Model for Enabling Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 4 (2010).

References

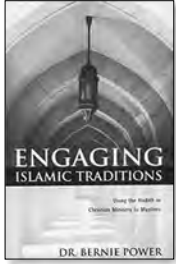
Shaw, R. Daniel

2010 "Beyond Contextualization: Toward a Twenty-First-Century Model for Enabling Mission." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 4 (2010): 208–15

Although Islam and the Qur'an are said to reject human atonement, the hadith do not. . . . The hadith affirm the sinlessness of Christ, the concepts of ransom and sacrifice, and other pictures of Christ's salvation.

Engaging Islamic Traditions: Using the Hadith in Christian Ministry to Muslims, by Bernie Power (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016, pp. 267 + xxi)

—Reviewed by Harley Talman



Why bother with the hadith? The collections are massive, their authenticity dubious, and reported accounts often contradictory. Having spent a score of years living and serving among Muslims in the Middle East and Asia, Bernie Power wrote a doctoral dissertation to answer this question which he shares in his lectures at Melbourne School of Theology and in this volume.

Bernie Power notes that the hadith (reported stories about the words and acts of the prophet Muhammad and some of his companions) are widely utilized in mosque preaching and play a major role in Islamic law and everyday life of Muslims, but he observes the neglect of this body of literature in Christian outreach. While certainly true, his bibliography fails to include Edward Hoskins' *A Muslim's Mind* (Dawson Media, 2011). The aim of *Engaging Islamic Traditions* is to seek out constructive avenues of approach to Muslims. He lists the various collections of the hadith, but due to the immense amount of material, his focus is on al-Bukhari's collection, one of the two most authoritative for Sunni Muslims.

This volume has four parts totaling eighteen chapters. Part 1 introduces us to the hadith, their classifications and potential use. Part 2, "Finding Concord," seeks out points of agreement of the hadith with biblical teaching as a preparatory step toward enabling Muslims to better apprehend the gospel. Power affirms positive features of Muhammad's life (chapter 4), comparing him favorably to Moses in bravery and zeal in obeying and applying the law. Also traced are Muhammad's generosity, care for others, humanness, humility, forgiveness, and tolerance. He also notes parallels in his experiences of inspiration (e.g., dreams) and charges of demonic possession (like John the Baptist and Jesus). Chapter 5 highlights those hadith which positively depict and deal with women (negative depictions appear in another volume). Theological and devotional material that is common with Christian teaching includes: (1) God's

attributes (omniscience, emotion/anthropomorphism, desire for human repentance); (2) prayers for worship and submission, forgiveness, guidance, and thanksgiving; and (3) eschatology (providing a chart with parallel teaching on the end times, heaven, and hell). Chapter 7 charts *some* parallel moral instruction.

Part 3 goes beyond the points of agreement in Part 2 to "springboards" to the person and work of Christ. God's character and actions (chap. 8) include his beneficence, holiness, initiative, nearness, and hints of theophany: "Allah created His creation, and when He had finished it, the womb got up and caught hold of Allah..." (116). Not surprisingly the hadith mention both positive and negative attributes of humans, but also that the consequences of Adam's sin fell upon his offspring: "You are the one who made people miserable and turned them out of Paradise (Buhkari 6.260)." Human identity is comprised of both individual and corporate aspects: just as individual Muslims are "in the Muslim Umma" so they are "in Adam" (132).

Good works and sin (chap. 10) are accounted as credits or debits. Power asserts that the hadith reckon other sins beside *shirk* (polytheism) as unforgivable (i.e., they exclude one from Paradise). While faithfulness in prayers will result in forgiveness of all sins, only 1 in 1,000 persons will be plucked from the fire, and assurance of salvation is quite uncertain even for 'Umar and Uthman. Some hadith indicate the inadequacy of works: "Your deeds will not make you enter Paradise" (B. 8.471), yet neither is there certainty even for Muhammad (153).

Interestingly, although Islam and the Qur'an are said to reject human atonement, the hadith do not (chap. 12). Chapter 13 outlines six principles in the hadith that point to biblical truth. The hadith affirm the sinlessness of Christ, the concepts of ransom and sacrifice, and other pictures of Christ's salvation.

The task of intercession is much wider in the hadith than in the Qur'an (where it is restricted to angels, God, and Muhammad—and the latter is quite limited). Several hadith also assert the supremacy of faith and love over good works but that faith should result in a changed life (198–200). Yet the lack of assurance of salvation in the hadith is one of the greatest differences from biblical teaching.

Part 4 discusses practical implications for using the hadith in ministry in opening doors to dialogue. Power outlines three types of dialogue: (1) *discursive* dialogue aimed at

While he acknowledges that some hadith are quite contrary to Christian beliefs, Power encourages appropriating those which are compatible with—or could be launch pads to—biblical truth.

convincing of beliefs, (2) sharing *religious experience* for the goal of understanding, and (3) secular dialogue for the purpose of cooperating in action. The author offers advice about what promotes proper dialogue. While exploitative or coercive “proselytization” are to be rejected, proclaiming one’s faith in respect and gentleness must be a given. Appropriate use of the hadith and other Islamic sources can convey respect and acceptance of Muslims. The hadith can also help Muslims to understand biblical inspiration. In contrasting Christian and Muslim views, (1) the primary revelation is Christ vs. the Qur’an, (2) witnesses to the revelation are the apostles vs. Muhammad, and (3) the record/explanation of the revelation is the Bible vs. hadith (213). Power affirms some validity to a functional comparison of Jesus to the Qur’an (not Muhammad), but he notes differences: the apostles were not merely witnesses, but also recipients, and even writers, of revelation. Also, the textual history of the Bible is vastly superior to that of the hadith.

As far as a dialogue of religious experience, Power is cautiously open to interfaith dialogue and possibly interfaith worship, based on Samuel and Sugden’s understanding of dialogue: “being open to other religions, to recognize God’s activity in them, and to see how they are related to God’s unique revelation in Christ” (217). Power endorses secular dialogue and cooperation on issues of social justice and morality.

“Discussion with Muslims” (chap. 18) outlines key topics in which the hadith can engage with scripture. Power responds to the criticism that his approach imposes meanings which are not in these texts: “every text is subject to interpretation, and each interpretation draws a different trajectory from the others, resulting in diverse conclusions,” as is evidenced by feminists, jihadis, and Sufis (232). Power then presents various ways to use the concepts and connections in his material (academic or public forums, journal articles, seminar papers to cross-cultural conversations to oral forms.) While he acknowledges that some hadith are quite contrary to Christian beliefs, Power encourages appropriating those which are compatible with—or could be launch pads to—biblical truth.

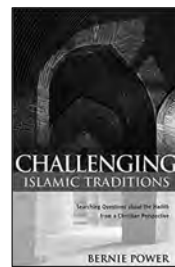
Engaging Islamic Traditions is an important resource for any Christian in outreach to Muslims, first of all, in the cause of understanding Muslims. While the Qur’an is their sacred scripture, the hadith function as the authoritative interpreter of the Qur’an; but probably more significantly, they provide the basis for Islamic orthopraxy in everyday

living. Secondly, the hadith can provide some tools to engage in conversation and stepping stones to biblical truth.

This volume is accessible to a general audience, yet scholarly documentation of sources is provided in endnotes following each of the short chapters. A number of diagrams, charts, and pictures protect the work from appearing as a heavy-text tome. A disadvantage of using the hadith is that many of them do not point to or parallel biblical teaching. For this reason, many like myself prefer to use Qur’anic material where there is more common ground than with the hadith. However, Power does address problematic hadith with a more confrontative approach in his second volume.

Challenging Islamic Traditions: Searching Questions about the Hadith from a Christian Perspective, by Bernie Power (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016, pp. 278 + xviii)

—Reviewed by Harley Talman



In contrast to the first volume, Bernie Power purposes to convey the widespread differences between the hadith (al-Bukhari’s hadith collection) and the Bible. He also thinks that the hadith can “help Christians and others comprehend some of the reasons behind Islamic violence, its lack of progress, and the so-called ‘clash of civilizations’ with the West and other countries” (xvii).

Again, Power structures his work into four divisions. Part 1 is entitled “Critical Issues.” The earliest extant anthologies of hadith date no earlier than mid to late 2nd century AH. Early hadith collections lacked complete chains of transmission (*isnads*) and with later ones it became easy to fabricate complete chains. Fictitious accounts multiplied (one apostate confessed to fabricating 4,000 of them). Biased political patronage was involved in the collection and even fabrication of collections, and the six collections accepted as authoritative by Sunnis today were not viewed as the only authorized ones by early Muslims.

Chapter 2 sketches the wide range of scholarly attitudes toward the hadith: non-Muslims typically being more critical. Some Muslims reject their authority as denigrating the

Skepticism over the reliability of the transmitters is not limited to non-Muslims: “All the Islamic authorities agree that an enormous amount of forgery was committed in the Hadith literature.” (Siddiqui)

sufficiency of the Qur’an, their historical unreliability, their doubts that the Prophet’s life was to be normative (e.g., the rarity of the term *sunnah* in Muhammad’s earliest biography). The relationship between the Qur’an and the hadith (chap. 3) is convoluted and inconsistent, in some measure reflecting the later widespread aphorism “the Sunnah decides upon the Qur’an, the Qur’an does not decide upon the Sunnah” (42).

Chapter 4 reveals some of the many contradictions between hadith, indicating that either Muhammad was inconsistent in his actions and/or the sources were contradictory. Some hadith belie Muslim claims to the infallibility of the Prophet:

I am a human being, so when I command you about a thing pertaining to religion, do accept it, and when I command you about a thing out of my personal opinion, keep it in mind that I am a human being. (58)

Sometimes he told them to do as he did, other times gave them the option, and at others forbade them to do so. The results of these inconsistencies (chap. 6) are uncertainty, a culture of randomness, fear of questioning, beatings, frustration, division, reluctance to innovate or experiment, and disregard of his advice. The leadership in the generations that followed often departed from Muhammad’s practice so that Power concludes, “no single standard way of being a Muslim has ever existed, even from the earliest days” (88).

Chapter 7 details the debate over whether the hadith should even have been recorded, given that in one instance Muhammad commanded it and in another forbade it. But “people of the hadith” generally triumphed over “people of the Qur’an (e.g., Caliph ‘Umar) and “people of the opinion” (rationalists). However, their commitment to emulating the life of the Prophet was not really a cornerstone for living until the late 2nd century. That then led to sanitization of hadith, as reflected in Ibn Hishām’s admission that he removed from Ibn Ishāq’s biography “things which it is disgraceful to discuss [and] matters which would distress certain people” (95).

Chapter 8 excellently outlines transmission issues. Discussion of the origin, types, and classification of the *isnads* is valuable. Skepticism over the reliability of the transmitters is not limited to non-Muslims: “All the Islamic authorities agree that an enormous amount of forgery was committed in the Hadith literature (Siddiqui).”

Part 2 contrasts the teaching of the hadith with that of the Bible in their views of God, the lives of Muhammad versus

Jesus (e.g., vengeance and violence), women, history, heaven, and hell. Many readers may already be acquainted with this material which has often been utilized by Christian apologists and polemicists. The author’s emphasis on contrasting Muhammad and Jesus seems to weaken the point of his first volume where the Qur’an (not Muhammad) functions as the revelatory equivalent to Jesus in Islam.

Part 3 provides negative evaluations of the hadith from modern perspectives: numerous scientific problems (chap. 14), departures from political, social, financial, and legal notions in the Bible (chap. 15), and human rights concerns (chap. 16).

Power concludes in Part 4 with practical implications of his study. He advocates challenging and confronting Muslims about the problems with the hadith which his book lays out, but with an irenic approach that balances truth and love. Power insists that regardless of one’s view of the hadith as largely compatible/incompatible with the Bible, discussion about its content must take place. However, this assertion needs to be qualified. Since even some Muslims are “Qur’an only,” then Christians may take the same position and engage in dialogue that is limited to their respective sacred scriptures. Nevertheless, in seeking to better understand the majority of the world’s Muslims whose lives are influenced by the hadith, Christians will find this book to be a great resource. **IJFM**

Note: There are some difficulties in the Arabic script used. A couple of words (*zaita* and *raiba* in note 42, p. 102) were not properly written and should have employed connecting forms of the letters used in Arabic script.