“On the day of judgment, will those who might have heard and believed the Gospel stand up to accuse such Christians [who opposed the Insider Movement] of hindering their salvation? Only God knows.” - IM advocate

“If I have to continue to live and obey the same culture—if I have to pray like a Muslim, if I have to keep the fast, if I have to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, then there is no difference, and why did I accept Jesus then?”

Introduction

- A question of meaning
  - Q: Bible pop-quiz. Can you name the chapter and verse for this passage?
  - “And because you are disciples, the Great One has sent the Helper of his Holy Messiah into our hearts, crying, 'Great God, Redeemer!' So you are no longer a prisoner, but a disciple, and if a disciple, then a follower of The Most High.”
    - Let's try it in the ESV: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”
  - Answer: Gal 4:6-7
  - The first version is from a back-translation of a version of the Bible for a Muslim people group that was produced using the principles espoused by the Insider Movement, which is our topic for today's class.

- Prayer

- A topic of increasing importance and visibility
  - Q: Raise your hand if you've heard of the Insider Movement in missions. If you haven't heard of it, what do you think it could mean based on its name?
  - Attempting a definition of the Insider Movement
    - A set of missions principles and practices that encourages (a) high contextualization of both biblical terms / doctrines and worship practices and (b) retention of Muslim cultural and religious identity for the purposes of security and evangelism
    - Note: defining the Insider Movement is like trying to define the Emerging Church (with which it shares some affinities) – nailing jello to a wall
  - Why this topic? Macro perspective: a “war of monotheisms”
    - Approx 1.57 billion Muslims in the world (80-90% Sunni, 10-20% Shi’a)
    - 50 countries are Muslim-majority
    - 20% are Arab; 62% live in Asia / SE Asia; the rest live in Africa or in the West
    - Prominence in the 10/40 Window – a huge and difficult mission field
    - Not just about the “war on terror” - Islam is (and always has been) a rapidly growing religious system that is antithetical to Christianity

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1 Or, more accurately, my own attempt at reconstructing this passage after hearing it read orally; the speaker (from Wycliffe Bible Translators) could not share the actual text because he was not supposed to have it himself.

2 Cf., Reza Aslan, No god but God
Note: beyond today's scope to give a full analysis of Islam; will have to assume a baseline familiarity with its basics

Why this topic? Micro-perspective: GA overture and Uptown missions

- In June, the PCA General Assembly will vote on *Overture 9 - A Call to Faithful Witness* (from the Potomac Presbytery)³
  - Focuses on translation issues regarding familial language but has broader implications
  - Goals: affirms the desire to reach the lost in hard parts of the world; denounces Insider Movement translations; encourages PCA churches to assess whether their missionaries use or promote the Insider Movement; calls for the GA to authorize a study committee

- The issue of Insider Movements has generally been kept within the missions circle and has had little, if any, airplay within the church (across all denominations) on any large level
  - Recent articles in Christianity Today, St. Francis, and ByFaith have gotten it out of the shadows and onto the table
  - This is a great opportunity for our denomination – which values both scriptural authority and missions – to take a leadership role

- Q: Anyone know what portion of our missionaries are focused on the Muslim world? Uptown supports 9 missionaries that are specifically targeting Muslim areas in Europe, N. Africa, and SE Asia – over 1/3 of our total

- The Insider Movement is spreading and has serious theological ramifications
  - “Honestly, if you can name an organization, then that organization has people practicing IM methodologies. But to be fair, most groups are undergoing a cold civil-war where members are facing off for and against, fighting for the heart of the organization – and the real battle has yet to be joined, mostly because western leadership is deeply committed to avoiding controversy.”

- This issue is incredibly relevant for this SS series because it is an excellent test case for thinking critically in evaluating theological positions and movements

• **Plan for the class**
  ◦ Cover the various features and practices of the Insider Movement
    ▪ Discuss the justifications offered by proponents
  ◦ Critically evaluate the positives (there are a few) and negatives (many more)
  ◦ Summarize with a 5-min video from one of our missionaries
  ◦ Practical applications

• **Important note**: unlike prior classes, there is not yet a PCA position on the issue, so keep that in mind as we go.

### A. The Basics of the Insider Movement

**• Preliminary comments**
  ◦ C1 to C6 spectrum describes and categorizes movements among Muslim-background believers (MBBs, or MBCs) based on the level of contextualization

![Chart A](chart.png)

*Source: Timothy Tennent, “Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques.”*

  ◦ C6 generally refers to small underground churches in a context of persecution
  ◦ The Insider Movement is generally classified as C5, as we’ll see below
  ◦ **Critical distinction**: Insider Movement / C5 is not the same thing as C6 (will explain)

**• Key distinctives of the movement**
  ◦ Caveat: not all practitioners are the same in how they define and apply these techniques, and no single ministry will have all of them. This is simply an attempt at cataloging the various activities and strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy / practice</th>
<th>Justification by proponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scripture (“Muslim Idiom Translations”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Son of God” → “Messiah” or other words such as Word, Christ, Savior-King, servant, companion, anointed king, he that is close to God, etc.</td>
<td><strong>Words</strong>: In Arabic, words for <em>father</em> and <em>son</em> have only biological meaning; thus, Muslims confuse divine sonship to mean that Jesus is God’s offspring via “sleeping with Mary” ○ They understand “Messiah” but believe the Bible is wrong in saying that God has offspring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Begotten” → “enthronement,”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sending, ascension, and similar terms

- “Offspring” (e.g., Acts 17) → servants or followers
- “Son of Man” → “Man from Heaven” or “the one who became man”
- “Father” → “Guardian,” “Lord,” or other words

- Use a glossary or footnotes to explain what Christ/Messiah means when it is used to replace “Son” (ethical, relational, functional, ontological)

“All Muslims have heard that Christians call Jesus the 'offspring of God,' and this has been presented to them repeatedly as exhibit A in the case against Christianity and its 'corruption' of the Bible. So there is a dire need to correct these misunderstandings and to invalidate the accusation in a timely manner. This can be done in communications of every sort, but by all means it should be done in the Scriptures.”

- Theology: Early Islam (from Muhammad) taught that Christianity has perverted God's word by teaching that Jesus is a son of Allah – not only do they misunderstand the concept when they encounter it, but they are taught to abhor it
  - Qur'an 9:30, 19:35, 6:101, and other passages state that (a) God cannot have biological offspring and (b) to state that he does is anathema, deserving eternal condemnation
  - Muslims are wary of Christian explanations of the terms and fear they are being tricked by the infidels into blaspheming Allah
  - The “son” phrase retains its negative connotations (neurolinguistically) even when the original Hebrew or Greek have been fully explained

- Linguistics: In reality, “Son of God” is simply a metaphor for the Christ or the Messiah
  - The NT uses the other terms expressing essentially the same truth
  - It is linguistically acceptable to change the metaphor to adapt it to the cultural norms (e.g., how should you render “whiter than snow” if someone in the target group has never encountered snow?)
  - Islam does not recognize “adoption” - an adopted child is still treated as a foster child in a legal sense, not in a familial sense. Thus, it is difficult to explain what “Son of God” means even using adoption language

- History: Arabic translations commonly practice word substitution for God, e.g., words for YHWH
  - We should not be so stubborn in insisting on using a phrase that evokes the wrong meaning or is deemed insulting to God

- Soteriology: Understanding divine sonship is not essential to one's salvation
  - Many English-speaking Christians confuse “Son of God” and “Father” as well

- Bottom line: “son” and “father” language in Scripture is confusing, culturally offensive, and misleading to Muslims, causing them to reject the gospels before they even read them

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5 Rick Brown, “Explaining the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts,” *IJFM 22.3* (2005).
6 Brown, “Understanding.” Brown analyses several passages of the NT to defend his position on the equivalence of Son, Messiah, Anointed One, Christ, King, etc.
### Worship / Practice / Identity

- **Retain identity** as a Muslim, not a Christian (legally and socially)
  - Community identifies them as such...and *they identify themselves as Muslims, too*
  - Not technically “MBBs” because they are still Muslims (it's not a “background” but a present reality)
  - No “extraction” (formal break)
  - Remains in his Muslim family and likely marries a Muslim

- **Refer to themselves** as “Followers of Isa” instead of “Christians”
  - Often referred to as Messianic Muslims, Isawi Muslims, etc.
  - Members of the “Isaya Umma”

- **Do not participate in the visible church**, especially C1-C3 churches
  - Focus is on personal relationship with Christ
  - Secrecy: unable to participate in visible Christian fellowship
  - Avoid sharing Christ publicly

- **Retain Muslim practices**
  - Continue going to mosque daily (31% go 1+ times / day)
  - Participate in standard Muslim prayers (Shahadah and Salat), alms, and even hajj (pilgrimage)

- **Culture**: Islam is not just a religion but a culture, and the two cannot be easily separated (contra C4)
  - Extraction / renunciation (as traditionally practiced) is a denial of cultural heritage and ethnic identity (not simply a religious identity)
  - Analogy to Messianic Jews who remain in the temple and practice some Jewish rituals
  - Fear of imposing Greco-Roman practices of “church” on a different culture / worldview set

- **Scriptural arguments**: Three key texts
  - Acts 15 (Jerusalem council): asking a Muslim to separate from their Muslim identity is creating an unnecessary “barrier”
  - 1 Cor 7:20 (remain in the situation which you were in): this applies not only to cultural but religious contexts
  - 1 Cor 9:19-22 (become a Jew to win the Jews, etc.): it is permissible to take on a different religious identity in order to reach the lost
  - Deceit is wrong, but dissimulation (concealing the truth) is not wrong if it advances the gospel

- **Misconceptions**: Islam is not a religion of works or obedience but one of sincere faith and piety
  - “Many Messianic Muslims talk about the Lord Jesus more than traditional Christians do, and they spend far more time studying his words in the Gospels”
  - The mosque is simply a quiet and reverent place, a house of worship, where a Messianic Muslim can say the Lord's Prayer, etc. on his own as well as talk to the others about Jesus

### Doctrinal Affirmations

- **Jesus is the savior and offers forgiveness for sins**
- **Muhammad is a true prophet of God, and Muhammad followed Isa**
- Shahadah (“There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet”)
- There are 4 heavenly books: Qur'an, Torah, Gospels, and Prophets (66% say Qur'an is the greatest of the 4)
- Avoid affirming the Trinity

- **Scriptural arguments**: 2 Kings 5:18-19 (Naaman talking to Elisha about worshiping Rimmon): it is okay to go through the motions of a false religion so long as in your heart you are actually worshipping God

- **Practical arguments**: One does not need to understand things perfectly to be saved
  - “We have found that saying the shahada does not harm the believer's witness to Jesus. On the contrary, it gives him a hearing.”
  - “What one believes about Muhammad is of little consequence. Affirming Muhammad does...”

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8 Brother Yusuf, *ibid.*
**Other strategies of IM**

- Evangelism methods:
  - Camel training method: use the Qur'an to share the gospel using Muslim terminology and Surahs (not the Bible) – e.g., Ruhallah
  - “Lives of the Prophets” - rewriting the OT to remove references to sin
  - “Seven Signs” - use of seven passages from the Qur'an to explain Christ
  - “The Seven Muslim-Christian Principles” - another method to use the Qur'an to share Christ
  - Some missionaries converting legally to Islam?
  - Exaggerating conversion statistics?
  - Keeping the movement “quiet”
  - Refer not to “churches” but “Jesus movements” and similar terms

- Evangelism defense
  - Acts 17: Paul's quotation of Aratus (Greek philosopher) in Athens. See also Jude's use of apocryphal writings.
  - Jesus worked to establish common ground with those he was reaching
  - Qur'an reveals certain things about God and Jesus that are accurate and is, thus, an acceptable starting point

- Other considerations
  - Individual piety is more important than participation in the church body
  - Cannot disclose identities due to security concerns

**Bottom line:** “We seek only to follow the Lord’s leading ... Am I in harmony with what God is doing or resisting it?”

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**B. Analysis: Positive and Negative Aspects**

### Positive evaluation

- **Q:** What are some positives that we can glean from these strategies and the argumentation offered? What do they get right?
  - Earnest desire to share the good news with those who have never heard
  - Further brings Muslim outreach / missions to the forefront
  - Roots of this approach (1980s) resulted in multiple new mission agencies and ministries being started
  - Highlights sensitivity to cultural norms and compassion towards Muslims
  - Rightly seeks to ensure missionaries are educated on the nuances of Islamic religion and culture and do no *de facto* impose Western paradigms for church

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10 Brother Yusuf, “Humble.”
11 Ibid.
12 Brother Yusuf and Rick Brown, “Humble.”
13 The Potomac Overture 9 skillfully affirms this positive side of the movement
- Cultural sensitivity and *some* level of contextualization (even up to C4) is good
  - Attempts to further our mission efforts in creative access / closed countries
  - Sensitivity to political and family persecution
  - Raises important hermeneutical and translation issues: how *should* we handle familial (son, father, beget, etc.) language given the visceral reaction of most Muslims?
  - Genuine desire to “get Muslims to give the Bible a chance”

**Critique (high level)**

- **Muslim Idiom Translations**
  - *Q:* Name some ways in which the replacement of “Son,” “Father,” etc. is problematic? Think along the lines of how such practice reveals one's view of the Bible, Christ, Trinity, and other areas of theology.
  - **Weak doctrine of Scripture**
    - All words are inspired (original autographs) and are inspired for a reason.
      - God saw fit to express the Father-Son relationship *numerous* times, for clear purposes.
      - No license to contextualize to the degree that core theology is changed.
    - Data from the NT shows that familial language is pervasive.
      - “Son of man” 89 times in NT, “Son” [of God] appears 20 times in 1 John alone, “Father” approx. 25 times in Matthew alone → this is a big deal.
  - **Weak doctrine of Christ and the Trinity**
    - “Son of God” is not equivalent to “Christ” (but is, of course, related). It is clearly not simply a metaphor; Jesus is uniquely begotten as God's “son.” Jesus is more than just the Messiah in a Jewish sense.
    - Ontological Sonship is critical to Christ's divinity. Notably, IM proponents talk much about Jesus as king, Word, messiah, sin-atoning savior, etc. – but rarely, if ever, mention his *full divinity*.
    - Jews were emphatically opposed to Jesus' claims of divinity and sonship of the Father (even tried to kill him for it), yet the apostles did not shy away from using the language.
    - Jesus who is simply a man who died and who is not the divine Son of God is not a real savior, and is not the savior presented in the Bible (cf., Jehovah's Witnesses)
    - The Trinity is a critical affirmation of Christian doctrine
  - **Practical / historical considerations**
    - Muslims accuse Christians of “perverting the Scriptures”; thus, doesn't intentional modifications to the Scriptures only exacerbate this even more? Is not IM doing the *exact* thing that Muslims accuse Christians of doing?
    - Bible translation is different than evangelism presentation. You justifiably may avoid “leading with” Jesus as Son of God when sharing the gospel (but eventually have to get there), but is there any possible justification for changing the words of Scripture? It is not a matter of stubbornness but reverence for God.

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14 Time and space does not permit a thorough analysis of all the points of IM
- The issue is not with the words but with Muhammad's original misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Trinity that then took root. In other words, it is a doctrinal issue to be explained, not a linguistic issue to be worked around.
- Postmodernism influence: shifting from author-intention hermeneutic to reader-response hermeneutic – but even beyond hermeneutics to changing the words!
- Recent scholars have demonstrated that there actually are some non-biological connotations of son / father that can be used in Arabic translations.
- The rub: it is incredibly difficult to “smoke out” this kind of activity because (a) backtranslations are hard to come by, (b) backtranslations are often awkward anyhow, and, notably, (c) those who are “in the know” doing the translation work may be one of the few English-speakers who even know the target language to begin with (thus the reason for the translation).

- **Worship / practice and doctrine**
  - **Q:** What issues do you think the practices of the IM raise? Negative implications for the lives of individual believers? Church?
  - **Weak ecclesiology**
    - Low view of the visible church and its role in the life of the believer
    - Low view of the fact that the convert is a “new creation” in Christ
    - Denies the C5 convert Christian fellowship, encouragement, discipleship
    - Administering the sacraments? Church discipline? Corporate worship / prayer?
  - **Weak soteriology**
    - IM tends to have a “lowest-common-denominator” understanding of salvation that is tied to confusing justification (as judicial act) with the entire complex of salvation (which includes sanctification, adoption, etc.). True regeneration and conversion does have content attached to it, including a right view of Jesus.
    - Syncretistic elements – denial of divinity of Christ, acceptance of Muhammad as inspired prophet, reverence for Qur'an, etc.
  - **Practical / historical considerations**
    - Ethical considerations: how do Muslims react when they find out someone has secretly converted but claimed to be Muslim for the sake of further proselytization? “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Co 4:2)
    - “The mosque is pregnant with Islamic theology. Muhammad is affirmed as a prophet of God and the divinity of Christ is consistently denied. Uniquely Muslim prayers (salat) are ritually performed as in no other religion. These prayers are as sacramental to Muslims as is partaking of the Lord's supper is for Christians. How would we feel if a Muslim attended (or even joined) our evangelical church and partook of communion … all with a view of becoming an insider?”
    - Relative newness and capitulation to postmodernism? Emerging church influence?

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“Western IM promoters are not converts from Islam; they are generally extremely pragmatic Evangelicals. The new crop of national IM evangelists are (usually) not converts from Islam, but are graduates from bible-colleges that are steeped in pragmatic western Evangelicalism. And national Muslim Background supporters of IM are all disconnected from their national churches; in many cases, they are actually ex-communicants of MBC churches, directly salaried by western supporters of IM. Western proponents of IM have yet to produce one national C5-style leader who is steeped in scripture and history, respected by his own people, and a church-planting/evangelical leader in his own right. Every single national leader (especially from a Muslim background) who satisfies those criteria opposes Insider Movements; in many cases those leaders have proven their loyalty to Christ and his Church by passing through the fires of persecution – and they are willing to do so again.” (Uptown missionary)

C. Perspectives from the field

- Thoughts from one of Uptown's own missionaries
  - “Generally IM is presented as very cool and avant-garde (think: emergent), the wave of the future for those in the know. It is also presented as the only thing that 'works.'”
  - “It is interesting to note, however, that in Bangladesh - where the IM experiment is the oldest, and has had more than 30 years to prove its validity - national Church leaders (led by Muslim-Background Christians) are unanimously opposed to the philosophy.”
  - “What is truly amazing is that it is the Word of God that brought these C5 Bengalis at last into the Church. After 20 years of literal 'just me and my bible'-style Christianity, these men were led by scripture to conclude that the westerners who had taught them IM were wrong: Christians are not supposed to be called Muslims. Christians are not supposed to live alone for the sake of evangelism. Christians are called to proclaim the name of Christ, even if it means alienation or death. Which is why it is vital that we keep scripture clean of man-made philosophies: it is scripture ('Son of God' and all) that led these brothers out of the darkness.”
  - “What is truly heart-breaking is that, after 20 years, so few C5 'converts' have survived. According to our brothers' testimonies, most have re-converted to Islam - or never realized that they left Islam in the first place. And that, dreadfully, is the 'norm' of life as a C5 'secret follower of Jesus'.”

- 5 minute excerpt from the documentary “Unheralded”
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzPK93pI65I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzPK93pI65I)
Conclusion

- The allure of pragmatism in dealing with God's word
  - Changing doctrine or practice to find “what works”
  - 1 John: doctrine truly matters and directly impacts how we live
    - 1 Jn 5:12 - “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

- In what ways do we act like “insiders” in our own lives?

- Be thoughtful in stewarding your money towards missions: do you agree with the techniques and strategies of those you support? Do you even know what they are doing behind the scenes?
  - Good motives do not justify bad execution and practice

- Lessons for how we deal with any similar controversial issue:
  - Scripture can be (mis)used to defend almost anything, so we need discernment
  - Systematic and Biblical categories must be used in evaluating arguments – both others' and your own