

LINDA SMITH

Disciple-Making Movements among Muslim People: Missiological Considerations

Introduction

The issue of how to disciple Muslims so as to result in a strong disciple-making movement is not a theoretical question. Recently, a Muslim background Adventist abandoned his family, fearing that staying would compromise his faith. Salim (not his real name) had initially seen dreams of Jesus which Adventists explained in terms of being called to be Jesus' disciple. But in the process of "translating" what discipleship meant for his particular context, he was told that this newfound identity in Christ demanded a radical rejection of his Islamic socio-religious and cultural heritage. The physical rupture that ensued was the logical next step in response to such an extreme view.

The underlying assumption for those who disciplined him was that Islam is primarily a religious deception and that it was created as a counterclaim to the core tenets of Christianity. Thus, it needed to be refuted and ideally eradicated from one's life before that person could truly become a disciple of Jesus. Frequently the term Islam is to be found in the same sentence with words such as, false, heretic, satanic, anti-Christ, and violent. Nuanced views may call for respecting Muslims as fellow human beings, while exposing Islam's evil agenda.

I question such logic on two accounts: First, biblically this approach misses the missional activity of God among every nation, tribe, language, and people group and makes Satan the primary actor in history, culture, and society (and while I do not believe that all religions lead to God, I do believe that God can be found walking among all of them). Furthermore,

I am yet to meet a Christian who is able to detach their theological and emotional disdain towards Islam from how they interact with Muslims.

Martin Accad is right when he wrote: “Your view of Islam will affect your attitude toward Muslims. Your attitude will, in turn, influence your approach to Christian-Muslim interaction, and that approach will affect the ultimate outcome of your presence as a witness among Muslims” (2001:29)

At a personal level, Salim experienced theological confusion, an identity crisis, displacement, fear, shame, pain, and rejection. In addition, his father has been sobbing during each phone conversation asking what kind of religion teaches its followers to dishonor their elderly parents. He thinks that Christians are treacherous people, they prey on the weak (because Salim is young), and they are bent on destroying Islam.

Salim’s older brother believes that behind his veil of piety, he is seeking a Western lifestyle like their neighbor who converted to Christianity so that she could marry an American, eat pork, and live a life disconnected from her past, which recently ended in divorce.

Salim’s local church does not understand the depth of this crisis, partly because for them faith is a matter of personal piety, something very personal between you and God, therefore, all these other layers of community, family, identity, culture, social network, and religious background has not been carefully considered.

Even more, Salim felt that his baptism had caused many in his local church to view him with curiosity rather than seeking ways to mentor and disciple him, so he felt disconnected and lonely in his new faith community; and yet Jesus had called him in dreams, so he had to respond and that meant joining a congregation, but which one? On the day of his baptism, God providentially provided someone to be in attendance who understood the unwanted implications of posting pictures on social media. Some church members were surprised to hear that even in a free country like the USA, such security measures were needed. They did not understand that baptism among Muslim people is perceived as betrayal, treason to one’s community, and even disrespect to Allah.

In the midst of this crisis, I met with Salim and together we revisited some core biblical teachings on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, what it means to follow him for a person born in a Muslim family and community. We discussed how he could carry out the mission that was entrusted to all believers.

Blessed to Be a Blessing: God’s Purpose for People

Could it be that when God calls someone to trust him, it is with the intent that they are blessed to become a blessing to their families, to

become a sort of Abrahamic presence in the midst of their community (Gen 12:3)? And if they are there to open the door of faith for their families and Muslim friends, how are they supposed to relate to those whom God has placed in their circle of influence?

When Salim discovered that God's calling is never a private affair, but a missional endeavor, he felt even more confused. As we explored the OT, he saw that Israel had been set apart (called) for the sake of the nations, and that the NT expanded that theme to include all the unreached peoples of the earth. Thus, Salim wondered how he could ever be a light when he no longer was in contact with his people and family. Perhaps he could become a missionary to other Muslims far away, but in the New Testament the progression was clear: from Judea, then to Samaria, then finally "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Why was Salim confused? Because he was presented with the false dichotomy of having to choose between faith and family and to see his family as enemies of his faith. He had not been invited to explore how his allegiance to Christ included the fifth commandment, which says: "Honor your father and your mother" (Gen 20:12) in ways that would not betray his identity in Christ. He had never understood that being in Christ, the *fight* or *flight* mentality must give way to reconciliation.

Because faith was presented as a personal (private) journey, he had kept it secret. The first few months were difficult. Salim had no one to help him explore what to do for the Islamic sacred month of Ramadan when the whole family fasted, or how to explain prayer as dialogue in contrast to ritualistic practices. Often he had to lie, hide, or pretend to follow along. The internal dissonance kept growing and his family started to question why he was often missing from family events.

As a first step towards healing, Salim and I spent several hours exploring the biblical view of a missional God and the mission of God. I felt it was critical not to start with what a disciple ought to be, but rather to explore who God is as the One who calls people to be in familial terms with him, "our Father." In ministering to Muslims, I have learned to start with God, not Jesus, not the church, not my Adventist faith, but with God. Especially God in creation.

Recovering the Primacy of God

The focus of the story of Creation for Muslims is not about how the material world came into existence, but rather about order in the world, structure, the power of God, his sovereignty over every person, and above all, the importance to discern God's purpose. Creation is not mechanistic, but purposeful, flowing from a wise and powerful God.

Together we looked at the story of the Great Controversy, using the Qur'anic narrative. Salim needed to see that the human problem is not simply lack of guidance or that we are weak because we were formed out of clay, but rather to see that God's reputation (honor) had been questioned, that Satan sought to promote an alternative form of government based on rebellion, and for that the devil sought to discredit the law while promoting disobedience. Sin is rebellion, it enthrones pride, which erodes the basis of Kingdom relationships.

Why was it important to frame the Great Controversy theme from the Qur'an? Wasn't Salim already an Adventist? If we look at him as an individual then perhaps we may feel justified in avoiding the Qur'an altogether; but if he is called so that God could also bless his family, then Salim needs to find the footprints of God that are known to his family. Only after exploring God's character, his way of governing the world, and the beauty of his law, could we look into how Salim could mirror God's own loving ways of being in the world.

Exploring who God is was both transforming intellectually as well as affectively¹. In ministering among Muslims, Christians should never underestimate the power of beauty. Muslims who understand Arabic are often moved to tears by the beautiful recitation of their sacred scriptures, for they see in beautiful sounds a sign of the presence of God in them. In interacting with Salim, this involved studying the biblical stories in a way that presented them in the most uplifting and appealing way possible.

Translating What an "In-Christ Identity" Means in a Muslim Context

After broadening Salim's understanding of God, the next topic we worked on was his identity. James Marcia defines identity as a "self-structure, an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history" (1980:159). I did not talk about external categories like Christian, Muslim, Arab, engineer, the son of Halim, but what it meant to have an identity *in Christ* that was also intertwined with others who were also *in Christ* around the world. Identity is like two sides of a coin. Even when you flip a coin you are still aware of the other side. For identity the two sides are God and community. From a biblical perspective, it is not possible to give allegiance to the head (Christ), and yet refuse to have anything to do with the body (his church).

Salim is starting to understand that he is part of a global end-time movement waiting for the soon coming of Jesus with the responsibility of inviting others to be grafted into this faith community. This end-time movement is rich, because it has people from every language, people

group (*ethnos*), and different cultural religious-social identities all united by the Lordship of Jesus, the Savior of all. Unity is based not in assent to doctrinal truth, but being in Christ and growing in Christ.

Salim and I restudied the concepts concerning the place of one's family vis-à-vis one's participation in the family of faith. Should the church family replace one's biological family? Jesus did say that one's family are those who do the will of his Father (Matt 12:50; Mark 3:31). Jesus also said that his father, mother, and sister are those who hear the word of God and carry it out (Luke 8:20). Indeed, when we are *in Christ*, faith and not genes, not ethnicity, creates a shift in our self-understanding and in the understanding of who is in the in-group and who is not. What it means is that our ultimate frame of reference is *in Christ*, while learning to love the world that God so loved (John 3:16).

Notice the words of Jesus: "Anyone who loves their father or mother *more than me* is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:37, emphasis supplied). This text is key for integrating "multiple identities" which may come into conflict. Up until then Salim had not seen that his family was a God-given gift. He did not chose them, but it was God who entrusted him to his parents, and provided brothers and sister of God's own choosing.

How did the followers of Jesus, who were the original recipients of the above teachings, translate them into their Jewish context? The history of the amazing expansion of the Christian movement indicates that new believers, like yeast in their existing dough, put their light on a lampstand for their household to enjoy (Matt 5:15). The gospel spread for the first few centuries from household to household (*oikos*),² as its message was lived out in the home, until it became a movement that conquered the most powerful empire of the world. For the jailer of Philippi, salvation was personal but not individualistic (Acts 16:30-34), for when the living Christ entered into his biological *oikos*, he transformed their source of bonding from kinship ties to a bond of faith.

In summary, the process of religious identity formation emerges at the intersection between several identity-markers: (1) how a person understands God, (2) how family is defined (status, expectations, etc.), (3) how much influence a social community has in defining the individual, (4) what type of faith community the person joins and how faith is expressed in the local community of faith (local church), and (5) how the society at large perceives the religious identity of that person/family.

One of the non-biblical legacies of modernity is the fragmentation of life where a person's values, belief system, finances, and love life are in different compartments, often pulling in different directions, causing the person to experience alienation and frustration. In Christ, these multiple

layers and identity are oriented into a common direction. How the in-Christ person learns to negotiate and translate how this looks is key to the sustainability of the local believers and to any expansion of a disciple-making movement.

In my interaction with Muslim background believers, I have noted that at times their identity confusion is not caused because they lack a biblical understanding of who they are becoming in Christ, but rather they lack language to describe their conversion³ in a way that accurately communicates how they understand themselves.

Adventists from a Christian background, instead of imposing certain labels on those coming from non-Christian contexts, should invite them to engage with the Bible so that they may find ways of self-representation, allowing them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit be in charge of the management of verbal and visual impressions that they wish to attach to their experience. For instance, in some cases Muslims have found terms such as Adventist, remnant, followers of Jesus, to be more accurate in describing who they are becoming than simply adopting the name Christian, which miscommunicates faith in Christ among Muslims. In other words, the identity crisis is one of representation, not internal cognitive or social dissonance, especially for people whose religion and ethnic identity are presented as one⁴ and to whom Christianity is another ethnic-religious community.

Reconciliation: In Christ and within One's Family

For Musa and for Mohammad, finding Islamic relevant language to describe who they are was key for entering into a process of reconciliation with their families. In their cases, it required them to seek forgiveness for acting in ways that seemed to promote a rupture with their loved ones. Their families gladly welcomed them back and once they understood that neither one wanted to destroy Islam, but to lift up Jesus, the one who purifies from error, they were ready to hear their message. Some family members have also become followers of Jesus.

The outcome is not always positive for in history there are the examples of the first Christians (followers of the way to be more accurate) who were expelled from synagogues. More recently the Millerites were disfellowshipped from their churches before they formally adopted the term Seventh-day Adventist and formed their own community. But as far as possible believers ought to be at peace with one another; however, when someone is threatened or disowned or no longer able to stay, their family in Christ needs to be prepared to receive them.

Salim's case is still unresolved, but after our study, he decided

to reconnect with his family over the phone, and let them know his whereabouts. He apologized for the pain he caused them and for the shame they feel in the extended family. He told his father how he wished that one day they could see that they have not lost a son, but won a better one. At this point his father's pain is too raw for him to be able to hear what he is saying, so Salim remains physically separated from his family.

Family and Discipleship

The primary context of life is familial and relational; thus, culture develops as it supports human relationships. In mission circles, it has become normative to speak of contextualization in reference to the gospel crossing from one particular cultural context to another culturally different context, but contextualization must also include careful consideration of the existing relational context that constitutes a person's social capital.

Is it possible that by creating a *virtual cultural context* detached from the meaningful relationships that people have, that Christian witnesses may be unwittingly destroying the very vehicle that allows movements to Christ to happen? Take for instance the many experimental churches in the 10/40 Window that have a local feeling, a C4 type of expression in the church. The place has no pews, outside there is a sign welcoming all to a "prayer house." The building is simple: with colorful carpets and beautiful calligraphy. The foreign missionaries adopt local clothing and sing in the native language, yet that building is full of people extracted from their natural settings, torn from their family and friends who are being disciplined as individuals and taught to be alienated from their families.

Such gathering places are perceived as competing with the existing social networks of the local community, and more often than not, they become the target of angry leaders who see such strange places as threatening local customs. Note that what is being rejected is not the gospel per se, but the cultural and social trappings that have been linked to it.

When extraction is the method used to separate Muslim background believers from their family relationships, then this approach destroys an important principle of life—social relationships are powerful God-given vehicles that allow the gospel to flow naturally along social networks resulting in a movement to Christ. In the future, I see more missiologists emphasizing the importance of right and stronger relationships in discipling Muslims, and from that vantage point, exploring how the new believers ought to navigate between observance and participation in cultural/religious traditions, which are a natural outworking of these relationships with family and community.

I am praying that Salim may find a go-between, a mediator, who could

help him reconnect with his family from a place of strength, transparency about his journey and struggles, and with a missional heart. I want to see him less driven by self-preservation and more committed to being a blessing to his family.

Stages for Discipling

Adventists have recently emphasized that “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (White 1942:143). Notice the stages of discipleship in this statement.

1. *Desire people’s good.* Twenty years ago my husband and I moved to Egypt with the purpose of studying Arabic and immersing ourselves in the Arab faith, culture, history, and people. To my dismay, within a few days I realized that I was not prepared to plunge into such a vastly different world. The mental map that had served me well all my life to make sense of reality was out of sync in this strange landscape, and the Arabic language seemed an insurmountable barrier. In those early days I realized that when you cannot love people, they become projects, targets, and then the conversation moves to techniques and methods to manage their responses. I pleaded with God to provide a way out of this dilemma. One late evening, the Lord and I had our *Jacob encounter* with the result that the angel did not dislocate my hip, but my heart. As I prayed, out of nowhere I finally said, Lord I will stay here if you will give me from your loving heart, love for this people. I did not have an epiphany that night, but for the next few days, I would get up with the Muslim call for early morning prayers (*fajr*) to intercede. Gradually God softened my harsh attitude and gave me his heart for the Arab people. Today I can honestly engage them as someone “who desires their good.” Muslims have often made kind remarks about the way they feel loved by me. I then tell them that my heart was unable to love, but what they see is God’s heart in a dim way within me.

In my case, the process by which God transformed me so that I could desire the good of my Muslim neighbors was twofold: prayer and understanding. In prayer, I was able to see the need to receive a new heart and to plead for it. Later as I carefully studied the story of the children of the East, I was convicted that loving the descendants of Ishmael and inviting them to enter into the blessing of the covenant was in harmony with God’s purposes and was the direction history has been moving all along until it climaxes in the message of Isaiah 60.

2. *Mingle*. Jesus walked among the people. Jesus was found on the roads where people passed, he went to their weddings, funerals, banquets, sat on fishing boats, attended religious gatherings, was where mothers could walk with their little ones, visited the temple, the court, the palace, and stood under a tree to call Zacchaeus. Many today may not have the opportunity to mingle with people like Jesus did; however, if that is your situation, ask God to show you who he already is working on within your existing circle of influence that God wants to bring into your life. Perhaps there is a fellow student, a coworker, your doctor, or your teacher that God want you to mingle with.

According to the PEW report (Lipka 2016), two thirds of Muslims are very religious people, meaning that only other very religious people will make sense to them. But, how will they know that we are religious people if they only see us from a distance? I am part of a team that ministers to 30 Muslim refugee families in our area. From the onset, we made the conscious decision to come alongside these families with the intent to see them integrated into American society as productive citizens and to live up to their God-given potential.

As we prayed together seeking God's direction, we felt convicted that God was calling us to be a healing community. The families were coming from war-torn countries and needed to be embraced by people of peace, people they could trust, and this required establishing meaningful relationships.

It has proven harder than we anticipated. Most Americans are quite open to passing out material things to newly arrived families in need or in offering services (ESL, driving people around, sorting out mail, helping kids with homework), but they struggle to welcome these strangers into their lives or get involved in situations beyond the controlled situations.

We then felt that in order to meaningfully minister to each family we needed to set up teams of five people per family in order to promote and grow a basic level of trust. This has not always happened, but where it did, it has brought new life into the life of those committed to relational ministry. God is using the organization, Adventist Muslim Relations, to bring new vitality into the life of local congregations that are moving from catering to their members to empowering disciples for mission.

At a macro level, I have come to see that God is working out his purposes in spite of the refugee crisis and the many natural catastrophes around the world. How? By breaking down the walls of separation between "them" and "us" so that we no longer offer excuses for not mingling. Being in close proximity with refugee families also exposes the real state of our hearts, and sadly what is emerging is a lot of fear, even hatred, and other fruits that are not consistent with the Kingdom of God.

3. *Offer hospitality.* The key for establishing credibility is hospitality. Credibility is what happens when people model godliness between your door and your table. Hospitality is vital discipleship and ministry. The path to the heart goes through the table. When Muslims come to our homes they can see what the lordship of Jesus looks like in the flesh. Theologically speaking, the purpose of hospitality is to prepare a welcoming space where people can encounter God's word. But hospitality also changes us. The way in which Romans 13 speaks of hospitality requires that the stranger moves from the outside into our inner circle and becomes our brothers and sisters.

Because hospitality in the Muslim context is strongly associated with being a godly person, Adventists ought to take this more seriously. In our homes, Muslims can see us praying, eating, and raising children for the glory of God. It is important that we remain honest, and that hospitality is not a show, a display of religiosity that fades as soon as our guests leave our homes.

Sultan told me that the first time he was invited to the home of a local Adventist he became convinced that "now we truly know that you love us." Hospitality has given me a new insight regarding how God deals with the sin problem and the plan of salvation. One particular parable stands out that is usually referred to as the parable of the tenants (Luke 20:9-19). God, the owner of the vineyard, sent workers to collect his share of the yearly crops. Muslims understand this well, he is the Master, we are his servants. The servants in the vineyard decide to take over the Master's rightful property. Note the hardening that occurs at each stage. The Master could have killed them right away, instead he gave them more and more opportunities, but they crossed the line when they rejected the Master's son, so judgment is the only merciful thing left to do, since if such people were to be left to persist, evil and deep injustice would be the only possible outcome. Muslims are appalled to see the rejection of the son and the failure to offer him basic hospitality.

As result of our mingling, they have brought us their friends and even family members. We speak on skype with them and minister God's love back to the Middle East. In one case, we prayed for a child that was unresponsive in a hospital bed in Australia, invited the aunt to put her faith in Jesus as healer and prayed together for Jesus to take charge of the situation. Within minutes the child opened her eyes to the astonishment of the doctors. The mother was so shocked by how it happened that her response was, "I believe everything, send someone to explain to me more about Jesus." We then contacted a local church in Australia so that they could send someone to minister to her.

4. *Showed sympathy (friendship).* Farid is proud to say that today he

understands that his emigration was not to America, but to God. He also said that Adventists have an important place to play in the lives of Muslims, as we model how to live in a godly way in a country that has so much freedom. He was referring to the many hours we spent speaking with him about godly parenting, how we enrolled their youngest son into our Pathfinder Club, and how we helped them to make lifestyle changes to deal with their diabetes and high-blood pressure. Two weeks ago he had a heart attack. Someone in our group who had just arrived in their home to pick up some freshly baked bread his wife had made, recognized the symptoms of a heart attack. She rushed him to the hospital, where he received an immediate procedure that saved his life.

5. *Win people's confidence.* This is not a technique in which friendship is a tool. In our group the confidence first became apparent when various families started to trust us with their deepest needs, the pain of infertility, the breaking down of relationships within their community along Sunni-Shia lines, spiritual questions about who God is, what is sin, who is the Holy Spirit, fears of the future, financial needs, and horrendous stories of pain and suffering during the war. Presently there are a couple of people in our group writing some of the stories and someone else has offered to publish them. We tried to help them focus, not on the pain and horror, but on how and where they saw God working in their lives in the middle of the pain of war, destruction, and death in the Middle East. They were able to speak about these things because they had come to trust us.

Our team has prayed that people will not see these approaches as just seeking fruitful practices, for mission is not about effective marketing. Approaching ministry that way is deceptive. We are not being kind so that Muslims can join our churches. Some missionaries have expressed frustration with rice Christians, but I wonder, could it be that some have been part of the problem by using rice in the first place to attract people into the churches? Is God glorified when anything but love is used to draw people to him?

We are learning to journey close to God in the presence of one another, learning to cry and mingle out tears with others, learning to rejoice every time a refugee child passes a test successfully or a new baby is born. We are called to faithfully live out our faith and to advance the Kingdom of God by prayer, love, and by rooting each family in the Word of God.

6. *Minister to their needs.* When working with refugees, it is easy to assume that their needs are only in the area of physical needs and feel satisfied with providing blankets, food, school backpacks, and even a used car. Of course those things are needed and welcomed, but I do not think this is what Ellen White means when she says that Jesus attended to people's needs. To the woman at the well, he spoke about her broken marital life,

to the paralytic he removed the shame of living with the sin that had led to his sickness, and to the bleeding woman he sends her back home in peace. Most of these needs were relational. When we mingle, we hear what the needs of the family are and we are then able to bring God into that need. But perhaps the biggest need is not one that most people are able to see—the need to receive cleansing from sin and freedom in Christ.

Jesus is the answer, but after 20 years I have come to see that part of the challenge of ministering among Muslims is that there is not clarity regarding what the question is. If you offer a remedy for cancer to someone who thinks he has a cold, you are not communicating. In our witness, the first building bloc towards creating this awareness is to show that God is good. God is full of mercy; God is always engaged; God cares; God welcomes questions; God loves to create out of darkness something beautiful; God, God, God—God can be trusted. If this so, where is the evil that we experience coming from? Well, an enemy has done this. Death, fear, and destruction is the work of the enemy, not God's work. God has a solution to remove the sin problem, and at the heart of God's own solution is his appointed source of freedom from sin and eternal salvation—Jesus.

The most common request we receive is that we pray with our friends. We are learning that every problem belongs to God, so we turn to him when seeking help. Often God wants us to be part of the solution and will give us a small role in the situation, but we never should take credit for the outcome. God is their real protector, not us. Our role is to always point people back to God. Yesterday we had a mother and her son in our living room. The young man has been experiencing a lot of distress. He was rejected as a Muslim among all the caucasians at his job. He could not take the pressure any more so left work. As result he had no money to get married and the family of his fiancé gave her to someone else. The pain was too deep so he sought and found temporary relief in drugs until he was caught by the police. Since he did not show up for his court hearing, he is now facing jail time. Together we asked God to show us how he is going to use this situation to heal this young man; we asked for God's mercy to be made clear. But I confronted him with the ugliness of sin and the human inability to deal with the sin problem. God has provided a way out by sending Jesus to carry our burdens and cleanse us from the "evil whispers from *Shaytan*" (using qur'anic language). I invited him to put his trust in the One who is able to carry our burdens, to seek God's forgiveness, to seek the forgiveness of his family, and to open up and talk with his father about what is happening instead of covering things up with one lie after another. Finally, we spoke about how when we live as God's people, we take responsibility for what we have done. This translates into going to the court, admitting wrongdoing without giving excuses, and appealing

for an opportunity to put things rights. If these are empty words to simply get out of the situation, God would not bless, but if they are coming from a sincere heart, God could turn this situation into a possibility. Today he is turning himself in to the police. My husband will go with him. They both left our home with peace, not that the external circumstances had changed, but that now they know that God is in charge.

7. *Invited them to become Christ's disciple.* All during this process, the centrality of God's Word is clearly presented. We do not have to wait till the end before bringing the Bible to the forefront. From the very first interaction, we take seriously the centrality of allowing the Word of God to bear witness to the Kingdom. In each conversation, we plant *word seeds*, then as trust evolves, Muslims start to ask questions. When that happens we do not answer them, but point to what the Bible says. As the questions deepen, we come to understand that God is nudging us to give them a Bible, which we will study together. In those studies we invite Muslims to tell us what they see. Often they want us to learn how some of the same truths already exist in the Qur'an or other Islamic sources. Each story is a door to the Kingdom and by studying the Bible we are able to see the various doors. But the question remains, who will enter the door? And once you are in, will you continue to grow—what is called obedience? Without obedience there is no real discipleship.

At a personal level I want to confess that lately the Lord has brought a new awareness of my own need of redemption in certain areas I did not see before. I am more and more aware of how deeply sin has taken root in my life and how to call others to radical obedience demands my own surrender. The battle is fierce, part of me is resisting, how often I have cried with Paul, "wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24).

Integration into the Body of Christ

The topic of integration into the Body of Christ deserves much more attention than just the few lines that are dedicated to it here. Unfortunately, integration into a local Body of Christ presupposes extraction of the Muslim believer from his community and integration into a new Christian community. But, if the gospel would instead flow within an existing social network, then the issue is no longer one of integration, but of developing appropriate ways to express the Kingdom of God in the forms, language, images, and religious vocabulary that best communicates gospel truth.

Islam: A New Understanding Needed

As long as Islam is treated as the counterclaim to Christianity and people place it under a Western category—religion—Christian witnesses will be missing the particular ways in which Muslims navigate between faith, culture, identity, family, loyalty to one’s community (*ummah*), and God’s will, guided by the Islamic worldview in which God is all encompassing, enmeshed, and unifying.

Islam is *din*, not religion; and *din* is a complete way of life: “Indeed, the *din* in the sight of Allah is Islam” (Qur’an 3:19). “The root of *d-y-n* has four primary meanings: mutual obligation, submission or acknowledgment, judicial authority, and natural inclination or tendency.⁵ Thus *din* implies two major ethical-theological considerations.

First, because we owe our existence to God (our Lord and Master), we are indebted to him. This is beautifully expressed in the primordial covenant between God and Adam: “And (mention) when your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify of themselves, (saying to them), ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we have testified.’ [This]—lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, ‘Indeed, we were of this unaware’” (Qur’an 7:172, Sahih International). This establishes human identity and dignity as being one of God’s servants. The response of the responsible servant is submission to the Master’s will in every area of life in accordance to the law (*sharia*) and its limits (*hudud*) established by God. And it is on this basis that human beings will be judged in the Final Day. God as Creator and God as supreme Judge are two foundational pillars for developing an Islamic understanding of God and of reality.

Second, because God is the Creator, everyone belongs to the human family, but within that shared community, which calls for basic reciprocity, there are levels of responsibilities and duties in accordance to a hierarchy of faith and community.

The duties between Muslims is stronger than between Muslims and non-Muslims. According to Saheeh Muslim, Book 026, number 5381: “Anas reported that the Companions of Allah’s Apostle (may peace be upon him) said to him: ‘The People of the Book offer us salutations (by saying as-Salamu- ‘Alaikum). How should we reciprocate them? Thereupon he said: Say: Wa ‘Alaikum (and upon you too).’” Most Muslims offer peace, blessings, and mercy to one another, but to non-Muslims, they ought to simply reciprocate their greeting by offering back what was offered to them.

In view of such a complex world, the gospel, as a story, enters like yeast buried in the ethno-religious dough. The inner workings of the yeast may

seem imperceptible for some time before it penetrates every layer of the *din* and transforms it from within. Conversion, thus, is the reshaping of all things when the everlasting gospel (Rev 14:6) becomes incarnate and leads to worldview transformation.⁶ The result is disciples who make disciples.

Notes

¹As we studied, for the first time I saw the “back of God” from Salim’s eastern eyes, which in turned enlarged my own picture of God. I am referring to the story of Moses, who is known in Islam as the friend of God. Moses wanted to see the face of God, the one he had traveled with from the Nile to Sinai and now almost to the edge of the Promised Land. Instead God told him that he would have to settle for his back. If I approach a person with a request, and instead she shows me her back, what is that supposed to mean? Rejection, request not granted, or not forgiven. But not so with the back of God, for on his back there are words, beautiful words: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exod 33:6).

²Oikos refers to the web of relationships a person already has, which may include hired servants, slaves, or former slaves who may have become clients, and others who were under the sphere of influence of this household and not only biological relatives.

³For those wishing to explore the nature of conversion, a good place to start is with Reinhold Straehler’s *Coming to Faith in Christ: Understanding Conversion* (2010), his chapter “Areas of Change in the Conversion Processes of the East African Muslims,” in *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?* (2013), edited by David Greenlee. Another useful resource from a sociological point of view is the book by Kathreen Ann Kraft, *Searching for Heaven in the Real World: A Sociological Discussion of Conversion in the Arab World* (2013).

⁴Other examples could include “to be Greek is to be orthodox” or “to be Latino is to be Catholic.” Both communities rely on religious institutions to preserve cultural traditions and ethnic boundaries.

⁵For instance, the Arabic term *dana*, which derives from *dyn*, means “being indebted”; this term conveys an entire group of meanings related to the idea of debt. The concept of civilization has always been associated in Islam with towns and cities. Thus, it is not surprising to find that some of the Arabic terms for civilization are also derived from the root *dyn*: *tamaddana* means “to build or found cities” or “to refine” or “to humanize,” while *tamaddun* means “civilization” or “refinement of society.” “When one considers the four primary meanings of the root *dyn*, one realizes that in Islam, religion (*din*) is natural to the human condition. *Dyn* conveys the idea of obligation or indebtedness, the acknowledgment of indebtedness, and the requirement to repay one’s debts” (Din and Theology in Qur’an and Sunnah 2001).

⁶For a detailed treatment on the subject of worldview, see Hiebert 2008.

Works Cited

- Accad, Martin. 2012. Christian Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach. In *Toward Respectful Understanding and Witness Among Muslims: Essays in Honor of J. Dudley Woodberry*, edited by Evelyne A. Reisacher, Joseph L. Cumming, Dean S. Gilland, and Charles E. Van Engen, 29-47. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Din and Theology in Qur'an and Sunnah. 2001. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/din-and-theology-quran-and-sunnah> (accessed 1 September 2016).
- Heibert, Paul G. 2008. *Transforming Worldview: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Lipka, Michael. 2016. Muslims and Islam: Key Findings in the U.S. and Around the World. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/22/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/> (accessed 12 November 2016).
- Marcia, James E. 1980. Identity in Adolescence. In *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, edited by Joseph Adelson, 159-187. New York: Wiley and Sons.
- White, Ellen G. 1942. *The Ministry of Healing*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.

Linda Smith and her family have served among Muslims for 20 years both in Central Asia and in the Middle East. Linda has dedicated her professional life to finding the footprints of God among Muslims and to connect them with the fuller revelation that is brought to us in the Bible. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies with a focus on Islam and Mission.