

# RETHINKING THE INSIDER MOVEMENT DEBATE: GLOBAL HISTORICAL INSIGHTS TOWARD AN APPROPRIATE TRANSITIONAL MODEL OF C5

*BY ABDUL ASAD*<sup>1</sup>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Phil Parshall was criticized sharply in the 1970's for his adaptation of Biblically acceptable Islamic forms in emerging Muslim Background Believer (MBB) fellowships. Using local language and calling believers 'followers of 'Isá' was one thing, his critics protested, but to adopt the very *forms* of Islam was wholly another. His approach however, has now become a model strategy for training in new Muslim ministry worldwide.<sup>2</sup> In the past decade, missiologists have taken Parshall's revolutionary adaptations to another level with the introduction of the possibility of MBB's retaining a *Muslim* self-identity rather than that of a 'follower of Isa'. This new approach, referred to as a C5-community or an Insider Movement, was formally articulated by John Travis in what has become the standard reference point for discussion on the various expressions of MBB fellowships worldwide. His 'C-Spectrum' ('C' stands for Christ-centered communities) begins with a C1 community, which uses 'outsider' (non-local) language and forms, and refers to themselves as 'Christians'. These churches reflect Western culture, and a huge gap exists between them and the predominantly Muslim peoples that surround them. C2 is basically the same as C1, except that 'insider' (local) language is used. C3 takes it a step further by introducing religiously neutral insider forms such as folk music or ethnic dress, etc. Their iden-

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<sup>1</sup> Abdul Asad (a pen name) is originally from New York, and studied at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is involved with ministry among Muslims in several different nations, with a home base in the Arabian Peninsula. His passion is to see Jesus Christ become incarnate in the darkest corners of the world by living the Gospel in word and deed, and empowering followers of Jesus from the global Church to do the same. He can be contacted via email at [abdulasad@rightbox.com](mailto:abdulasad@rightbox.com).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publishing, 2003).

tity is 'Christian'. A C4 fellowship goes beyond C3 by allowing Biblically acceptable cultural *and* Islamic forms (Parshall's example above). The identity of a C4 MBB would be that of a 'follower of Isa' or something similar. Travis then introduced the concept of a C5 fellowship as a group of MBB's who decide to

remain legally and socially within the community of Islam, somewhat similar to the Messianic Jewish movement. Aspects of Islamic theology which are incompatible with the Bible are rejected, or reinterpreted if possible. Participation in corporate Islamic worship varies from person to person and group to group. C5 believers meet regularly with other C5 believers and share their faith with unsaved Muslims. Unsaved Muslims may see C5 believers as theologically deviant and may eventually expel them from the community of Islam. Where entire villages accept Christ, C5 may result in "Messianic Mosques". C5 believers are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and refer to themselves as "Muslims who follow Isa the Messiah".<sup>3</sup>

A C6 community describes those MBB's who are often completely isolated from Christian community because of threats to their personal safety if their identity as a Christian were disclosed. These believers often meet Christ through dreams, visions, media, or the like, and represent a community of people who are seen as Muslims, and refer to themselves as Muslims for their own safety. C6 represents an unfortunate reality in this present age, and since their presence in this category is often *involuntary*, few, if any writers, have taken issue with their situation (thus, neither will this paper).

Much the same as the reaction that Phil Parshall's C4 strategy evoked several decades ago, discussions on C5, also referred to as 'high spectrum' contextualization, have become increasingly intense in the literature. Proponents such as Travis and Joshua Massey maintain that C5 is simply a descriptive analysis of an already existing phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> Oth-

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<sup>3</sup> John Travis, 'The C-1 to C-6 Spectrum', in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34:4 (October 1998), p. 408.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, John Travis, 'Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa: A Closer Look at C-5 Believers and Congregations', in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17:1 (Spring 2000), pp. 53-59. See also, John Travis, 'Must all Muslims leave Islam to follow Jesus?' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34:4 (October 1998), pp. 411-415. See also, Joshua Massey, 'Misunderstanding C5: His Ways are not our Orthodoxy', in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40:3 (July 2004), pp. 296-304. See also, Joshua Massey, 'His Ways are not Our

ers such as Gary Corwin, Timothy Tennent, and Parshall are leery of the potential misuses and abuses that C5 opens the door to, particularly that of syncretism.<sup>5</sup> One concern here is that field workers (who often lack the time to sift through the literature) can end up embracing an imbalanced view of C5, either blindly following a radical/syncretistic view, or writing it off altogether. Many see the potential positives of C5 missiology, but their ministries have been unable to benefit from it because of the complex and often murky water that surrounds it. Different people have different definitions of C5, which only adds to the confusion. While no one wants to see syncretistic fellowships of MBB's emerging, is there a way for us to think about and practice C5 as a transitional model toward a healthy contextualized indigenous church? Thus, while this paper is certainly intended to move the academic discussion on C5 forward, it is also intended to assist field workers in gaining a healthy view on the Insider Movement discussion. As this paper will demonstrate, a brief survey of the complexity and diversity of Christian expression in church history will quickly remind us that our faith has an ever-changing nature and as such, we must be ever open to the new things that God may do.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, we must be careful to ensure that this newest (and very exciting) translation of our faith into the Islamic

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Ways', in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 35:2 (April 1999), pp. 188-197. See also, Joshua Massey, 'God's Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ', in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17:1 (Spring 2000), pp 5-14.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Timothy Tennent, 'Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 "High Spectrum" Contextualization', in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23:3 (Fall 2006), pp. 101-115. See also, Phil Parshall, 'Danger! New Directions in Contextualization', in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34:4 (October 1998), pp. 404-406, 409-410 and Gary Corwin, 'Insider Movements and Outsider Missiology' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 42:1 (January 2006), pp. 10-11. Joshua Massey has also relayed an interesting conversation with Phil Parshall in his guest editorial in *IJFM's* Spring 2000 edition. He says that the conversation centered on 'so-called C-5 missionaries' who advocate the genuine prophethood of Muhammad, perpetual mosque attendance for MBB's, and for Christians to legally convert to Islam to win Muslims. This is a good example of the dangers inherent in 'high spectrum; contextualization if not carefully monitored.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Walls, in, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 3-7, provides an example of this point in discussing a fictional space visitor who observes Christian expression at different times in history and in different places as being shocked at the diversity of expression he observes.

world does not result in some sub-Biblical, sub-ecclesiological form of faith that fails to honor Jesus Christ completely in the Islamic cultural context.

Many have assumed that this newest missiological debate over high spectrum contextualization in the Muslim world represents a new thing. This is a wrong assumption. We can learn much from those who have gone before us and, as such, this paper will begin by providing some helpful insights learned from the translation of Christianity into the African context. Many of these same discussions, after all, were had not long ago in Africa. A second look at this issue will focus on a case study of contextualized ministry among Muslims from a little-known 19<sup>th</sup> century Indonesian movement attributed to the leadership of a man named Sadrach Surapranata. We will then consider helpful insights into the emergence of a 'deviant' form of Islam from within its own circles (which is what Insider Movements purport to do) as we briefly consider the fascinating world of the Ṣūfīs within Islam. Finally, the paper will conclude with a brief prescription of an *appropriate*<sup>7</sup> model of C5 that is designed to help both academics and field workers to discuss and practice Insider missiology in a clear and Biblical manner.

## 2. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

### *2.1 The fact that a discussion of syncretism exists in the first place is testament to the work of God among a people*

What a wonderful problem to wrestle with! If God were not working in the Islamic world today, we would not even be having this discussion. After a century of solid church planting work in Africa, the concern of religious syncretism is still one of the most pressing needs to be addressed. The continual re-emergence of African Traditional Religious forms is an ever-present reality with which African church leaders wres-

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<sup>7</sup> I have chosen the word 'Appropriate' in the same sense that Charles Kraft has used it in the volume he has edited entitled *Appropriate Christianity* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2005). Here Kraft describes this term as being more accurate to describe what 'good' contextualization aims for, which is to be 'maximally meaningful' to local cultures and 'maximally faithful' to Scripture.

tle daily. Ghanaian scholar Kwame Bediako states, ‘Since the 1960s it (African theology) has been greatly concerned with the theological reinterpretation and rehabilitation of the pre-Christian primal tradition...’<sup>8</sup> This fact does not figure to go away any time soon. While syncretism has indeed adversely affected the Church in Africa, it has not crippled it. Its existence is an ongoing part of the growth process. Just as we have come to accept the battle against syncretism as a part of the growth process in Africa, so we should accept this battle in the Islamic world as well.

***2.2 Don't jump to conclusions! Let us be careful not to label things as syncretistic until we fully understand the situation***

Western theologians were quick to attack what they perceived to be syncretistic patterns in the emerging African church. After some time however, it became clear that these fears were unfounded, as new and Biblically appropriate forms of the faith appeared in Africa. Nigerian theologian Lawrence Lasisi remarks:

Historically, Western writers and church leaders have been hostile to syncretism and have used the word pejoratively to describe some of the innovations and initiatives of African indigenous churches. These churches have been accused of distorting or watering down the essentials of the Christian faith. But careful examination of some of the motives behind the integration of African traditional themes and elements with the Christian faith reveals that it is misleading to label every indigenous movement as syncretistic, although some undoubtedly are.<sup>9</sup>

We love to label things that we are suspicious of because labels make things ‘safer’ and more predictable. But as we have learned from the African context, these labels can stunt some perfectly valid, new and heretofore unseen expressions of the faith if applied prematurely. Consider all of the contributions that the African church has made to the faith in the areas of ecclesiology, Christology, and other realms. We would not

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<sup>8</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Lasisi, ‘Syncretism’, in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive/Zondervan, 2006), p. 900.

have them if preliminary fears of syncretism had won out. We must remain always mindful to 'be quick to listen, slow to speak...' as James 1:19 warns us, lest we jump to conclusions. Who knows what valuable contributions the Muslim world is ready to make to the global church if we would but allow it time to develop?

***2.3 Sola Scriptura. Scripture is the hermeneutic by which we interpret the translation of faith into a new culture***

First, we must trust the word of God to lead and guide new converts into truth. Secondly, we must trust these new converts to *allow* God's word to so penetrate their lives that it directly confronts any unbiblical patterns in their lives or their culture. How much are we willing to invest in C5 fellowships inasmuch as they may have little or no connection to the larger church at present? One of the most powerful tools for the spread of Christianity in Africa was the re-interpretation of a primal religious past in light of a new history as revealed by Scripture in the form of new 'ancestors', like Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The more that Scripture penetrated the hearts and minds of African converts, the more it confronted ungodly practices and reclaimed them for Christ. This is an ongoing process and can be seen today in the issue of polygamy in the church in places like Nigeria. There are pastors in Africa today who still spend much of their time calling Christians to account in light of Scripture on the issue of polygamy.<sup>10</sup> As believers are confronted with God's unchanging truth, they must readjust their lives and cultural practices accordingly. Once again, Bediako comments, 'Scripture and culture are like merging circles, gradually coming to have one centre as we increasingly recognize ourselves in Scripture and Scripture becomes more and more recognizable as our story.'<sup>11</sup> If this has proven true in Africa, why should it not be so in the Islamic world?

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<sup>10</sup> I have a Nigerian friend who just completed a major regional initiative whereby he facilitated the signing of a pledge to end polygamy in 68 different churches in his state. This came after many of these churches had existed for several generations!

<sup>11</sup> Kwame Bediako, 'Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition', in *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4:1 (June 2001), p. 2.

***2.4 Solā Fide. Faith in Jesus Christ is the ultimate measure of one's standing before God and in relation to his brothers and sisters in Christ***

Paul Hiebert's masterful application of set theory in missiology is most helpful here.<sup>12</sup> Only when we rid ourselves of the notions of 'Church', and 'Christian' as 'bounded' sets can we begin to appreciate God's sovereign, albeit confusing work among Muslims today. We must begin to see this work in terms of 'centered' sets, whereby one's direction in relation to the central point of the set (Jesus Christ) is the only thing that matters. We should affirm all that points people toward the center, and deny all that points them away. In the early days of Christianity in Africa, many mistakes were made in this area. Baptism was often refused based on a convert's lack of formal Christian knowledge. Only when missionaries began to baptize converts irrespective of their theological knowledge did the church begin to grow. In those places where the only requirement for baptism was a profession of faith in Christ alone, the church exploded. This growth continues, as one out of every five Christians in the world today is African!<sup>13</sup> We must make the requirements for the baptism of MBB's as simple as possible, without confusing the *kerygma*.<sup>14</sup> This is something that most missionaries (of the C4 and C5 variety) agree upon.

To take our discussion one step further, let us consider our evaluation of *Solā Fide* missiology in relationship to the core issue at stake in the C4/C5 debate – that of self-identity. Tite Tienou has discussed Ali Mazrui's 'Yoruba model' of 'triple cultural heritage' in which the Yoruba of Nigeria were able to absorb the religious and cultural propositions of Christianity and Westernization into their own traditional worldview.<sup>15</sup> Without getting into the implications of the Westernization portion of this model (which is beyond the scope of this paper), I

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), pp. 107-136.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> The core non-negotiables of the Gospel. e.g. the virgin birth, the cross, etc.

<sup>15</sup> Tite Tienou, 'Which Way for African Christianity: Westernization or Indigenous Authenticity?' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28:3 (July 1992), pp. 256-263.

would like to point out that Tienou and others<sup>16</sup> have described the process by which the church was planted among the Yoruba as one where the Yoruba initially *did not* give up their primal cultural/religious identity. Instead, of their own accord, they decided to ‘allow’ the spread of this new religion while simultaneously holding to their old religious identity. Why could they not be Christ followers *and* Yoruba (read, practitioners of African Traditional Religion) at the same time, they reckoned? This sounds very much like the C5 stance today where Muslims are choosing to remain within the community of Islam without directly identifying themselves as Christians (or anything that sounds un-Muslim, such as ‘followers of Isa’). Only recently, after significant numbers of Yoruba people have embraced Jesus Christ, has the discussion of dropping the old primal religious identity surfaced. This shedding of the old identity has also been helped by the introduction of new alternative Christian forms and rituals in the place of traditional religious ones. Praise God, after many years the Yoruba are now formulating a new religious identity based on their faith in Jesus Christ over against their old primal religious identity.

Hiebert’s centered set approach is particularly valid in this instance. In this case, those Yoruba who decided to turn toward the center point of Jesus Christ chose to do so without dropping many of the cultural *or* religious practices that they had previously known. Over time, and with great care on the part of missionaries, these Christ-facing Yoruba, with all of their self-identity issues, were disciplined into a new self-identity that is more outwardly Christian. Speaking about this outward expression of a heretofore-inward truth on behalf of his fellow Africans, Tineou states, ‘We recognize no center of the Christian faith except Christ himself.’<sup>17</sup> Why should this not be the case in the Muslim world today if Insider Movement missiology is carefully, patiently and prayerfully guided? The truth is we will not know the answer to such a question for several more decades.

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, a nine-part documentary by Dr. Ali Mazrui entitled *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: WETA/BBC, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Tienou, ‘Which Way for African Christianity: Westernization or Indigenous Authenticity?’, p. 260.



### ***2.5 Converts first, then disciples.***

Reading McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle in its best possible light (and as I would contend, its true intention), we should take advantage of the reality that people like to become Christians without crossing barriers. *After* scores of Muslims have subjected themselves to Christ in homogenous units, the process of discipleship should include an understanding of their relationship to other believers, not before. In the case of Africa, the spirit of tribalism is rampant. If Africans had been implored to immediately join a community of 'others' with whom they had a violent past before professing faith in Jesus, many would have never come under his Lordship. Only after decades of tribalism within the Church have fellowships begun to emerge that are reflective of the greater body of Christ in Africa today. One such shining example exists in Accra, Ghana, in the form of City of God Church. Pastor John Kpikpi has written a masterful book on exactly how this process of discipleship is occurring in his church today, whereby they are creating 'one new man' in Christ (Eph 2:15) out of many.<sup>18</sup> It was *not* this way from the start though. Converts initially came exclusively along social and cultural lines of similarity. While fears of 'Churchless Christianity' are certainly valid in that MBB's in C5 fellowships might seem to exist apart from the established church, we must remember that when C5 is practiced properly believers are indeed part of a church (in its barest form) in that they 'meet regularly with other C5 believers'.<sup>19</sup> In time, we should help them move toward a fuller expression of church. If we have learned from Africa, the lack of this fuller expression in the initial stages of a movement should not frighten us.

These five lessons gleaned from the African context are but a sampling of the many insights that can be applied in the current effort to contextualize the Gospel in Muslim cultures today. In the final analysis then, if we should learn one thing from the growth and rooting of the Church in Africa, we must understand that the process of indigenization of the Gospel message is complex, and very lengthy. It is one that is fraught with uncertainty and 'messiness'. Despite this, which of us would argue that it has not been well worth it in the case of Africa? By

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<sup>18</sup> John Kpikpi, *God's New Tribe* (Accra, Ghana: Hill City Publishing, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Travis, 'The C-1 to C-6 Spectrum', p. 408.

the grace of God we will say the same for the Muslim world some day soon!

### 3. LESSONS LEARNED FROM 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY JAVA

It has been argued that the best view on high spectrum contextualization is to see C5 as a temporary approach that will eventually lead to C4/C3 expressions of faith.<sup>20</sup> I would agree with this assessment because I believe that such a transitional model of high spectrum contextualization has already proven successful. And it is to this little known, but highly effective 19<sup>th</sup> century model from Indonesia that we now turn.

#### ***3.1 Lower spectrum approaches have rarely been successful to make large numbers of initial converts from Islam***

In 1849 a man named W. Hoetzoo was commissioned by the Dutch Missionary Society (NZG) to evangelize Muslims in Central Java. In his first three years he made forty converts (a seemingly remarkable feat). However, only ten of these ‘met the requirements for baptism’.<sup>21</sup> Hoetzoo was described as a ‘hard liner’ who ‘required converts to make a radical break with their culture’.<sup>22</sup> He would not allow any practices that even hinted at religious or cultural conformity with Islam. For example, he outlawed circumcision among his converts because he felt that Muslims would view this act as a compromise with Islam.<sup>23</sup>

In 1851 Pieter Jansz was commissioned by the Dutch Mennonite Mission Society (DZV) to go to Jepara in Central Java. Like other low spectrum practitioners of his time, Jansz was seen as a ‘hard liner’ who would not baptize a man named Tunggul Wulung because he ‘lacked sufficient Biblical knowledge and was deficient in the areas of Christian life and

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<sup>20</sup> See for example, Tennent, ‘Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques’, p. 113. See also Herbert Hoefler’s response to Tennent’s article in the same issue of *IJFM*, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Sutarman Partonadi, *Sadrach’s Community and its Contextual Roots: A Nineteenth Century Javanese Expression of Christianity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

doctrine.<sup>24</sup> Wulung eventually found another to baptize him, and went on to become one of the first great Javanese evangelists. With this kind of low spectrum approach, it is no wonder than Jansz, a faithful and hard-working missionary who translated both the Old and New Testaments into Javanese, baptized only seven people during his entire career in Java. The exclusive nature of this small Christian community that existed in the midst of a large Muslim majority land was not seen as inviting to Muslims, but as offensive. It should be noted that the major areas of offense were not necessarily theological ones (which would have been expected), but cultural ones.

Partonadi has ably summarized the conditions of Javanese missions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century before the establishment of higher spectrum endeavors as being primarily Western in character and exclusive in nature (demanding a radical break with culture).<sup>25</sup>

### ***3.2 National believers are often the ones who initiate higher spectrum approaches, not missionaries***

Travis, Massey and Bernard Dutch have repeatedly stated that their descriptions of C5 are just that – descriptions of work that is already going on with or without their approval.<sup>26</sup> As explained above, the situation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Java was not good for the church of Jesus Christ. A large Muslim majority population dwarfed any expression of Christianity, which seemed destined to make little progress with its low spectrum applications by foreign missionaries. Onto this scene stepped the newly baptized evangelist Tunggul Wulung. As was customary, Wulung had recently publicly debated and defeated a man named Pak Kurmen who was the *imam* that had trained a young boy named Radin (Sadrach Suranpranata). When Sadrach saw that his beloved *ngelmu* (teacher) had con-

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<sup>24</sup> A.G. Hoekema, 'Kiai Ibrahim Tunggul Wulung (1800-1885): Apollos Jawa', in *Peninjau* 7 (1980), p. 11, as cited by Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots*, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots*, p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> See for example, Travis, 'Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa', and Massey, 'God's Amazing Diversity'. See also Bernard Dutch, 'Should Muslims Become Christians?', in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17:1 (Spring 2000), pp.15-24.

verted to Christianity as a result of his public defeat at the hands of Wulung, the young Muslim *murid* (pupil) was stirred.<sup>27</sup>

Sadrach later approached Wulung (the same Wulung who was seen by Jansz as unfit for baptism) and was impressed with his teaching that one did not have to leave the Javanese *adat* (ancient Javanese cultural and religious tradition, including Islam) in order to follow Christ. Wulung felt that Javanese Christians should *remain* Javanese by teaching that they must 'seek a Christ for themselves'.<sup>28</sup> If it weren't for his teaching on remaining in the *adat*, this statement could be interpreted as a C4 position. However, by teaching that Javanese followers of Christ could remain in the *adat*, it appears Wulung's strategy marks the beginning of Insider Movement missiology long before the term existed.<sup>29</sup> It should come as no surprise then, that after his conversion, the brilliant and charismatic Sadrach quickly developed a following of perhaps 6,000 MBB's in a few years time by implementing Wulung's high spectrum contextualized approach.

During the time that Wulung and Sadrach were ministering in Java, they were constantly under extreme pressure from foreign missionary societies at work in that land. The societies were not only unfavorable to this radical approach; they were actually hostile – trying to stop the work on several occasions. Since it was no longer formally associated with any foreign agency however, this autonomous Insider Movement was not to be stopped.

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<sup>27</sup> Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and it's Contextual Roots*, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Hockema, p. 17 as cited by Partonadi.

<sup>29</sup> It is largely based on the practice of giving Javanese people the option to remain in the *adat* – which meant keeping a traditional Javanese cultural and religious (i.e. Islamic) identity – that I have described the approach of Wulung and Sadrach as being an Insider Movement model. It is important to realize though, that we have little information as to how long these people maintained their *adat* identity, and we are not sure how many of the converts actually chose to do this. Nevertheless, this approach does bear the marks of a high spectrum movement in church history despite the obvious lack of a more 'developed' missiological theory like the one in question in our own time.

### ***3.3 Insider Movements are a great way to gain numerical momentum, but they can't last forever***

Remember that at the start of this section, I stated my agreement with Tennent and Hoefler that Insider Movements should only be a temporary bridge to a C4 or C3 expression of faith. The reality is that once the movement grows to a sufficient size, Muslims begin to catch on that these 'strange kind of Muslims', to borrow Massey's terminology, are actually Christians!<sup>30</sup> Thankfully, by the time this happens the movement is usually large enough to sustain itself, despite the threat of persecution. Simply stated, there is strength in numbers, and Insider Movements can give us this critical mass before a more formal expression of faith is necessitated. This more formal expression of faith is the type of contextualized Christian fellowship that C3 and C4 communities exhibit. Thus, if there were a goal here, it would be to see C5 approaches produce sufficiently large numbers of converts who will be able to support each other as a wholly new community (read, new non-Muslim identity) emerges over time.

Thankfully, we have an historical example of just such a transition thanks to our friend Sadrach Surapranata. By the time Sadrach died in 1924, his communities of Javanese Christ followers numbered around 20,000!<sup>31</sup> What began as an Insider Movement due to its emphasis on believers remaining a part of the Javanese *adat* eventually became a family of C4 and C3 communities in Central Java. Because of their substantial size, these communities (churches) were more readily able to express their faith in Jesus Christ despite opposition from their Muslim neighbors because, as noted above, there is strength in numbers. Where smaller communities would have been easily stamped out, Sadrach's transitional contextual approach of C5 communities becoming C4 communities were sufficiently large enough not only to survive, but also to

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<sup>30</sup> See for example, Ishtiyag Danish, 'Contextualization: A New Missionary Approach to Muslims', *al-Tawhid* 5:3&4 (nd), pp. 1-20. See also 'Christian Missions: The New Crusade', [www.mrc.org.uk/the\\_new\\_crusade.php](http://www.mrc.org.uk/the_new_crusade.php) and 'Jesus Mosques and Muslim Christians', [www.balaams-ass.com/alhaj/jesumosq.htm](http://www.balaams-ass.com/alhaj/jesumosq.htm).

<sup>31</sup> Jacqueline Rutgers, *Islam en Christendom* (The Hague, 1912), p. 239 as cited in Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and it's Contextual Roots*, p. 129.

challenge surrounding Muslim communities for allegiance to Christ over against Muhammad.

***3.4 If the desired result of an Insider Movement is a new indigenous expression of Christianity that continues to grow and multiply in C4/C3 fellowships, then at least four things are needed:***

- 1. Local, lay leadership;***
- 2. Culturally familiar religious forms;***
- 3. The authority of God's Word;***
- 4. The exclusivity of Christ***

David Garrison's fascinating book, *Church Planting Movements*<sup>32</sup> lists several criteria for the rapid reproduction of churches that he has tracked around the world today. One of these criteria is a commitment to local, unpaid leadership. It makes sense that if we are to see the type of mass people movements to Christ that Insider Movements aim to provoke, it must happen through local, unpaid leaders. There are simply not enough foreign workers or enough funds to see it any other way. In the case of 19<sup>th</sup> century Java, while the efforts of missionaries like Jansz were crucial (Bible translation, consulting for indigenous leaders), it was clear that these 'foreigners' were never going to spark the kind of massive movement that indigenous leaders like Wulung and Sadrach did. Furthermore, the idea of a paid minister was completely foreign to Javanese thought.<sup>33</sup> Sadrach's movement is a good model for us in this area, and we would do well to follow it.

Since the believers who followed Sadrach were encouraged to remain in the *adat*, they were used to Javanese Islamic forms and rituals. Initially, their Javanese identity was inseparable from Islam, even after their decision to follow Christ. Once sufficient numbers of converts had come in, one of the main ways that Sadrach was able to create a C4 expression of faith was through the reinterpretation of Islamic forms. For example, the beating of a drum served as the call to worship (as in the mosque). The buildings themselves were designed to look just like mosques (there were no images or crosses). Pastors were called *imams*

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<sup>32</sup> David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Bangalore, India: WIG Take Resources, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Partonadi, *Sadrach's Community and its Contextual Roots*, p. 163.

or *gurus* as in any traditional Javanese community. Traditional Javanese clothing and dietary guidelines were observed. Men and women sat separately during worship. Chanting of memorized scripture that eventually produced a state of mystical experience with Allah (God) was a regular part of worship, just as in the Sufi form of Islam that the Javanese practiced. An open Bible was laid out on a stand in the front of the church just as the Qur'an was in the mosque (as a sign of respect for the holy book). A Christian *shahadah* was formulated that stated:

I believe that God is One.  
There is no God but God.  
Jesus Christ is the Spirit of God,  
Whose power is over everything.  
There is no God but God.  
Jesus Christ is the Spirit of God.<sup>34</sup>

It is no wonder that 20,000 Javanese were caught up in this move of God's Spirit, as there was nothing foreign about it. As can be inferred from the way that the Bible was laid out during worship, the Javanese Christians held it in very high esteem. They were used to holding the Qur'an in high esteem, yet it was a book that most of them could not even read! How much more did they esteem the Bible, a holy book that was written in their own heart language? Members of Sadrach's churches often memorized large portions of Scripture, as many were illiterate. Sadrach himself composed a handbook containing the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and Matthew 22:37-40 (the Greatest Commandment) which was supposed to be memorized by everyone.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, we can clearly see from Sadrach's Javanese community that there was an absolute commitment to Christ as exclusive Lord and Savior. It was common for Sadrach's evangelists to compare the risen Christ to Muhammad in their preaching. One evangelist, named Soleman, preached the following lines in a sermon,

Granted, Mohammed had some power... it must still have been far inferior to that of Christ. Mohammed can only hear if the face is turned toward the east

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

when praying; Christ, however, has the power to hear no matter how one twists or turns, to the east, west, north, and south. Thus, Mohammed has only power in the east, but Christ in the east, west, north, and south. Is Christ not, then, greater than Mohammed? Granted, Mohammed was someone. That is natural. But ask a *santri* once if Mohammed ascended into heaven. What does he answer? Maybe? What maybe? We have certainty. Our Savior ascended; we know the day – forty days after his resurrection... Brothers, Mohammed is in Arabia, the dead Mohammed is there! Christ, the living Christ is in heaven.<sup>36</sup>

It seems as though the fear of a syncretistic Gospel that started with an Insider Movement within Javanese Islamic culture is almost ludicrous, given the nature of the aforementioned sermon. Here, years after the movement had matured and was making a transition toward C4 in the C-Spectrum, MBB leaders were clearly quite well informed about the deity and exclusivity of Jesus Christ. More than that, they were obviously intent on sharing this information with others. This naturally leads into our final lesson from Sadrach Surapranata's 19<sup>th</sup> century movement.

### ***3.5 Honesty is imperative. Christ must never be denied, even in C5 settings***

There is an Islamic teaching called *ṭaqiyyah*, which is a legal means of staying alive for the Muslim whose life may be threatened if he were to disclose his Islamic faith. Essentially, *ṭaqiyyah* allows one to 'hide' their true Muslim identity as long as he remains a Muslim in his heart.<sup>37</sup> This doctrine has opened the door to all kinds of deceit by providing a justification for lying. In a shame-based culture, such justifications are gladly implemented when 'saving face' is often more important than truth telling. C5 practitioners must continually beware of the trap of a 'reverse-*ṭaqiyyah*' effect within Insider Movement missiology. As Paul has stated, 'We do not use deception.' (2 Cor 4:2) The danger of denying Christ in the name of 'keeping a secret' or of 'saving face' in C5 fellowships is real, and cannot be understated.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>37</sup> Ron George, *Issues and Insights into Church Planting in the Muslim World* (WIN Press, 2000), p. 84.



Throughout our case study of high spectrum contextualization in 19<sup>th</sup> century Javanese culture, one thing is abundantly clear – believers were taught never to deny Christ or to be deceitful about their identity. Since there was no distinction between Javanese culture and Javanese religion, there was no ethical problem with calling oneself a follower of *agama Allah* (the true religion of God), nor with calling a leader an *imam* or a *guru*. As believers would come into trouble for preaching Christ from time to time, however, two new terms arose, *Kristen abangan* and *Kristen Jawa*. These terms referred to believers who were confronted about their deviant beliefs (such as the superiority of Christ over Muhammad), and were translated as a ‘Christian who does not adhere to the foreign religion, but to the Javanese expression’.<sup>38</sup>

To be sure, many Javanese believers were persecuted and sometimes martyred for their faith during Sadrach’s days. They understood that it was never acceptable to deny Christ. This is a point that C5 proponents are careful to make throughout the literature, fully acknowledging the difficulties inherent in such a subject. Sadrach’s movement then, is a good reminder that a highly contextualized ministry can indeed produce those who ‘take a stand’ for Jesus when they must.

The lessons that we can learn from Sadrach Surapranata and his team of indigenous evangelists in 19<sup>th</sup> century Java are many. I hope that the few insights we have gleaned in this brief survey will be helpful to the discussion of high spectrum contextualization in two major areas though. First, Sadrach’s community provides us with a model of high spectrum contextualization that was able transition from C5 to C4. Secondly, and I feel most fundamentally, Sadrach’s community should serve as an example for us of the fact that Insider Movements can and do happen without syncretism, and can result in a strong indigenous expression of C4 or C3 faith.

#### **4. LESSONS LEARNED FROM WITHIN ISLAM: A SUFI MODEL**

Given all of our discussion about the possibilities of higher spectrum approaches to reach large numbers of Muslim peoples from within their

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<sup>38</sup> Partonadi, *Sadrach’s Community and it’s Contextual Roots*, p. 287.

own framework by allowing a new movement to emerge with minimal religious and cultural barriers, it behooves us to look more carefully at those who have *already* done it – the Sūfis. Essentially, the Sūfi movement began within orthodox Islam a millennium ago as a response to a growing legalistic and worldly leadership within Islam. Its practitioners sought a more personal spiritual connection with Allāh. It was soon seen as a theologically deviant sect, resulting in a wide range of responses, from nothing at all to outright persecution in places. Nevertheless Sūfism added to its numbers substantially through a variety of means that eventually enabled it to coexist alongside Islam.<sup>39</sup> Today there are many varieties of Sūfism as expressed in different brotherhoods, known as *Tarīqas*. Although numerically inferior to the whole of Islam today, Sūfism is here to stay, boasting millions of adherents who live in the very heart of Islamic societies worldwide.<sup>40</sup>

#### ***4.1 Self-Identity is a multi-faceted issue, so why not use that to our advantage?***

Bernard Dutch has done well to remind us that the issue of one's self-identity is much more complicated than we might like to think. He states that

[the self-identity of MBB's] is a multi-faceted issue that defies simple explanation and often frustrates external expectations. As cultural outsiders, we often see the issue in false clarity, imposing simplistic understandings of terms and relationships. For many Muslim background believers, identity is fluid, taking the most appropriate form for the situation.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Malise Ruthven states, 'From about the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries Sufism in all its varieties became so widespread and pervasive as to be virtually co-extensive with Islam.' Quoted from Ruthven, *Islam in the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 247.

<sup>40</sup> I believe it is worth exploring the possibilities of having certain C5 fellowships maintain an identity as a *Tarīqa* known as 'followers of 'Isá', complete with their own *zawiyah* (church), *shaykh* (pastor), and *muqaddams* (elders). This idea is also cited in George, *Issues and Insights into Church Planting in the Muslim World*, p.114.

<sup>41</sup> Dutch, 'Should Muslims Become Christians?', p. 16. See also, Syrian-born MBB Mazhar Mallouhi's self-depiction as a Sufi in Paul Gordon-Chandler's *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

I can personally attest to the veracity of this claim, having portrayed my religious identity in a variety of ways at different times and among different crowds without ever feeling I had ethically compromised or used deceit. Jesus certainly did not let all of his cards show right away, choosing to refer to himself in a variety of ways in different situations.<sup>42</sup>

In the case of Sufism, a great advantage is that there seems to be no end to the countless manifestations of the mystical experience. This made them much more difficult to 'pin down' as a movement. Likewise, C5 fellowships today can take advantage of the Sufi model of a fluid self-identity.

#### ***4.2 What's so bad about being viewed as a strange new sect? It was good enough for the early Church***

The early church was viewed as a strange new sect within Judaism at its inception, and eventually took on a completely new identity. Initially deemed 'Followers of the Way', they became known as 'Christians' at Antioch. (Acts 11:26) It has been well established that anything viewed as a 'Christian' movement will not make it very far in the Islamic world.<sup>43</sup> Why not embrace the idea of being seen as a strange new sect within Islam itself, as we have seen from the Ṣūfīs that it can be done?<sup>44</sup> A C4 approach will not likely be able to do this because as 'followers of Isa' MBB's are soon found to be 'Christians' if they do not keep enough of a Muslim profile. I am sure it can be done in certain situations (probably within Ṣūfism where 'new identities' are welcomed). In an orthodox area though, a C5 identity would be more beneficial.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The Son of Man, I Am, the Christ, the Son of David, etc. were all used by Jesus to describe himself in different situations.

<sup>43</sup> Fouad Elias Accad has written a most helpful book for Christians to share their faith with Muslims called *Building Bridges* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1997). Having spent a lifetime in the Middle East, he too attests to the validity of MBB's following Christ as a 'Muslim' as one who is now *truly* 'surrendered to God' in Christ Jesus (Gal 2:20).

<sup>44</sup> See for example, Richard Jameson and Nick Scalevich, 'First Century Jews and Twentieth Century Muslims', in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17:1 (Spring 2000), pp. 33-39.

<sup>45</sup> According to Massey, Muslims view C4 believers as 'a kind of Christian' while they view C5 believers as 'a strange kind of Muslim'. This makes a big difference! For a visual comparative analysis of this point, see Massey, 'God's Amazing Diversity', p. 7.

### ***4.3 Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's...***

Having been disillusioned with the political mess that *Sharī'ah* often created, many Ṣūfī *Tarīqas* renounced political agendas altogether. This was very attractive to the Muslim masses that were also disillusioned. Insider Movements would do well to duplicate this approach.

### ***4.4 ...and to God what is God's***

Whenever funds came in, Ṣūfīs were quick to 'finance the brotherhood's wide-ranging charitable activities.'<sup>46</sup> Emerging C5 movements should look for ways to serve the community, thus obeying God *and* gaining the favor of the people.<sup>47</sup> This is also a good opportunity to point out the necessity of keeping foreign funds out of the movement as much as possible. Thus, any growth that occurs will be sustainable because it will have occurred without foreign money, which is often a temporary entity.

### ***4.5 Bring the women's liberation movement to the Muslim World***

Ruthven observes, 'In their heyday, the orders provided an outlet for female devotion denied by official Islam... Women were enrolled into the orders as associate members and were even sometimes permitted to preside over groups of female *murids*.'<sup>48</sup> While many Muslim women will profess their undying allegiance to Islam (sometimes more strongly than men will), the fact remains that Islam leaves fully fifty percent of its followers with little or no meaningful participative ability. By creating avenues for women to serve and use their gifts, Insider Movements will be building on one of the most successful elements of Ṣūfīsm.

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<sup>46</sup> Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, p. 250.

<sup>47</sup> We can learn something here by way of gaining good will in the community from *Hezbollah*. Although most Lebanese see *Hezbollah* as foreign intruders and terrorists in their midst, they are still welcoming to them because *Hezbollah* has always known how to serve the people so as to gain their favor, suspect as their reasons for it may be.

<sup>48</sup> Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, p. 248.

#### ***4.6 Visions and dreams should be discussed openly***

Şūfis are fond of validating their vocations, positions of leadership in the community, etc. by sharing that it was revealed to them in a dream from Allah. Likewise, the vast majority of MBB's today report some type of vision or dream (often of Jesus) as being fundamental to their conversion. Why not encourage MBB's to share their story of a vision of Jesus as received directly from God in order to validate their claims? The mystical Şūfis do it.

#### ***4.7 Sola Fide, again***

It is no secret that the human soul cannot live under the requirements of the law without eventually feeling the weight of impossibility. The resounding 'works mentality' of Muslims will never be able to touch their soul in its area of deepest need – relationship with God. It is for this reason that mysticism and union with God have been staple ingredients of the Şūfi movement since it began.<sup>49</sup> As Ruthven relates, 'Yet from the first there were Muslims whose psychic or spiritual needs were unsatisfied by mere obedience to the deity and the dutiful observance of his commandments. They sought a closer and more intimate relationship...'<sup>50</sup> Şūfism arose then, as a direct response to the spiritual vacuum that Islam creates on the level of soul intimacy. How much more, with the Holy Spirit himself indwelling believers, should Muslim followers of Jesus be willing and able to reflect God's deep longing for intimacy and relationship with his children through the person of his Son?

As we close this discussion of penetrating Islam from within, I would like to make one final comment pertaining to high spectrum contextualization. Most of the insights from the seven 'lessons' listed here could be implemented by C4 or C5 fellowships. The defining factor as I see it though, comes down to the perception of these fellowships by Muslims themselves. Since C4 MBB's are seen as 'a kind of Christian', albeit a *more palatable* kind, they are unable to reach as deeply into Islamic culture as C5 MBB's can, being viewed as 'a strange kind of

<sup>49</sup> This longing for communion with the Divine has historically gotten Sufis into trouble with orthodox Muslims. Some, such as the famous Şūfi saint al-Hallāj, have paid with their lives.

<sup>50</sup> Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, p. 221.

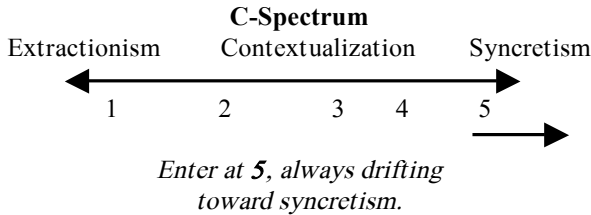
ture as C5 MBB's can, being viewed as 'a strange kind of Muslim'. This means that C4 fellowships can indeed implement many of the insights from Sūfism. It also means however, that C4 fellowships will have a *limited* scope of influence in Islamic culture that will extend only as far as the Muslim majority is willing to allow a 'Christian' movement to go. In contrast, C5 fellowships have the freedom to influence Islamic culture on a much broader scale, as they are more likely to be allowed to carry their movement further, being viewed as a deviant sect *of Islam*.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has sought to address some of the complex issues at stake in high spectrum contextualization ministries among Muslims. We have done this by way of comparison to three other movements across time and throughout the world. Our analysis has taken us from the Middle East to Africa, then Asia, and back to the Middle East again. In doing so, I have attempted to illuminate some of the key concerns in high spectrum ministry. Many of the 'lessons' we have learned are applicable at multiple points on the C-Spectrum. I would like to conclude however, by addressing some primary concerns of C5 critics, most of which I share in myself. I intend to do this by making a distinction within C5 itself that I feel is crucial to understand this debate. Pictured below are comparative tables that will distinguish between what we will call 'Syncretistic C5' and 'Appropriate C5'.

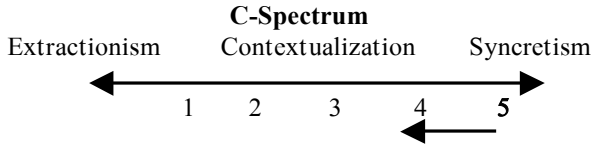
'Syncretistic C5' represents most of the fears concerning Insider Movements. If not carefully monitored and guided, many C5 ministries could end up in this model. 'Appropriate C5' represents the exciting possibilities of properly guided (both by man and God) Insider Movements. I sincerely believe that this transitional model will be acceptable to both sides of the current debate on high spectrum contextualization for two reasons. First of all, it brings further clarity and distinction to the often-ambiguous Insider Movement discussion in such areas as methodology, ecclesiology, ethics and anthropology. One of the biggest obstacles in the current debate concerns the overall confusion about what exactly is meant by C5 or Insider Movements. Different authors have used it in different ways, resulting in more confusion than is necessary.

## Syncretistic C5



1. Methodology: almost always prescriptive
2. Insider primarily means IN mosque
3. Ecclesiology: content with low expression of church, *koinonia* (fellowship) is enough
4. Churchless Christianity a real danger because of ambiguous goal for expression of church
5. Homogenous Unit Principle employed liberally with little or no concern for Kingdom diversity, thus likely to remain homogenous over time
6. Missionaries free to adopt C5 identity
7. Views C5 as a *permanent strategy* and sees little or no need to move toward C4/3
8. Self-Identity: **Muslim** follower of 'Isá
9. Perceived ID: Muslim
10. Likely to affirm *Shahādah*, prophethood of Muḥammad, problematic Qur'ānic texts
11. Qur'ān and *Injīl* seen as equal
12. Susceptible to 'reverse-*Ṭaqiyyah*' effect.

## Appropriate C5



*Enter at 5, always transitioning  
toward contextualization.*

1. Methodology: chiefly descriptive, prescriptive use is situational
2. Insider moves from IN mosque to IN social /familial networks
3. Ecclesiology: move from low expression to higher expression of church, *ekkllesia* is goal
4. Churchless Christianity not likely because of clear vision for C4/3 New Testament churches
5. Homogenous Unit Principle recognized, but with end goal as ‘Ephesians Moment’ disciples, reconciled to other expressions of global Christianity
6. Only national MBB’s may adopt C5 identity
7. Views C5 as a *temporary strategy* to gain momentum and critical mass for C4/3
8. Self-Identity: Muslim *follower of ‘Isá*
9. Perceived ID: Strange kind of Muslim, possibly with deviant theology
10. Re-interpret *Shahādah*, respectfully avoid discussions about prophethood of Muḥammad and problematic Qur’ānic texts
11. *Injīl* elevated above Qur’ān
12. ‘We do not use deception.’ (2 Cor 4:2)

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We can converse more intelligently when we are using the same language about this subject. In future discussions of C5, we should qualify *which* C5 we are speaking of.

The second reason why I feel this transitional model will satisfy both sides is that it has a more clearly delineated end goal, which is marked by limits on all sides. The end goal of 'Syncretistic C5' is unclear, and thus leaves open dangerous possibilities such as syncretism or Churchless Christianity. By way of contrast, 'Appropriate C5' has a clearer set of guidelines that should not be compromised, and a clearer end goal – an indigenous church movement that is well related to the global church.

While we must be careful to be Biblically and culturally 'appropriate' in our role in the transmission of the Christian faith, the lessons we have learned from the African context should allay our fears somewhat. Additionally, we should not wonder *if* a transitional model of high spectrum contextualization is possible, because Sadrach Surapranata has proved that indeed it is. We can also thank the Şūfis for providing us with a shining example of the very thing that Insider Movements aim to do – penetrate Islamic culture with the Gospel of Jesus Christ from within its own ranks. Finally, and most importantly, we must remember that high spectrum contextualized ministry is as dangerous as it is promising, which is why the Spirit of God is needed more than anything else. Further discussion on an 'appropriate' model of C5 ministry is needed as we move forward.

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