

Discipling the Nations & the “Insider Movement” Conversation

Kevin Higgins

This issue of *Mission Frontiers* is devoted to keeping the attention of mission practitioners focused squarely on disciple-making. I welcome the opportunity to address discipleship from the perspective of the so-called “insider” paradigm. I am not going to describe a strategy for multiplying disciples and disciple-makers. I have two far more modest ambitions: The first purpose is to clarify terminology; the second is to close what I think might be a gap in communication.

Terminology

There has been a good deal of discussion and even heat surrounding the controversial topic of insider movements. Briefly stated, those of us who write about such movements are seeking to describe contexts in which groups of people have come to faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord while remaining in their social and some aspects of their religious culture. This attempt at description has also led to a great deal of collaborative inductive Bible study and biblical reflection about the Kingdom, God’s ways of reaching and saving people within their *ethne* (nations), and what authentic discipleship looks like.

In the process of this ongoing discussion and reflection, many of us who advocate that such emerging movements are an authentic part of what God is doing in mission have also realized that the term “insider movement” is unhelpful for a variety of reasons. “Insider” can smack of something secretive, even questionable (as in “insider trading” for some westerners). It has struck some as an elitist term.

Kevin Higgins is the International Director of Global Teams, which is devoted to equipping teams from many nations to multiply disciples of Jesus within cultures least aware of the Gospel. Kevin has been used to initiate discipling movements among several Muslim peoples, and is currently working on a PhD in Bible translation. To discuss this article with me, join me at the new interactive MF website: MissionFrontiers.org—Kevin

So-called “insiders” themselves have criticized the term as it seems to them to speak of yet another separation into “us” (for example, outsiders, bridge-people, the missionary) and “them” (the “insiders”).

Because of this, at a meeting in Bangkok 2010 a proposal was made that we begin to work at changing our terminology. This meeting included practitioners from several organizations working among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. It also included key leaders from several different insider movements in several different countries. While we did not settle on a detailed common terminology, we agreed wholeheartedly that we needed to move towards language such as:

- “Movements to Jesus within Islam” (or Hinduism, or Buddhism)
- “Kingdom movements to Jesus”
- “Jesus movements that multiply disciples obedient to the Bible within different religious traditions”

While some of the expressions differ, a common theme has been a shift from an emphasis on the word “insider” to an emphasis on the word “Jesus.” This is not a new emphasis in our thinking and philosophy. We have always assumed such a focus on the Lordship of Jesus. But it does seem to bring to the fore something we may have allowed to go unstated exactly *because* it was assumed.

I want to state as clearly as possible here the core conviction that this shift in terms truly seeks to bring to the fore: *Jesus and Jesus alone is the Savior, and Jesus and Jesus alone is Lord.* If we have not been clear enough in this for our critics, it is because we have assumed this was understood.

Communication Gap

Part of the communication gap in the insider/non-insider discussion may be that “we” in the insider “camp” have not clearly articulated how devoted to making disciples we are. And this may have suggested to some of our critics that we are not interested in discipleship.

The two largest insider movements of which I am aware are both devoted to the ongoing inductive study of the Scriptures in group settings aimed at fostering obedient disciples who allow the Word to constantly reform their lives, behaviors and beliefs. These movements are aimed, in that context, at fostering the multiplication of groups where this can take place.

How does this impact discipleship? As believers in community engage with Scripture regularly and over time, the Holy Spirit uses the Word and mutual admonition to enable disciples to grow in obedience. As such, and like any disciple in any context, they begin to see things in their culture, worldview or behavior that they must reject. They see other things that can be re-interpreted and given new biblical meaning. They discover other things which need to be re-valued in their lives (given either greater or lesser importance than before faith in Jesus). And they can also discern things that can simply remain.

I would suggest that this biblically-centered discipleship process is actually the mission paradigm we most care about. In fact this is the paradigm that allows *all* paradigms to stand under the Word. And it is exactly at this place that I believe it is possible for us to share common allegiance with even our sharpest critics.

Conclusion

There is another way to describe the paradigm I have sketched above. I have touched on the “Jesus alone”

dimension above. And just now I have touched on the place of the Word in discipleship.

Such convictions have been expressed before in another age, an age in which God reformed His church and enabled a recapture of central truths. I speak of the Reformation, of course. And in the vocabulary of the Reformation we could describe “Kingdom movements to Jesus” as discipleship rooted in the classic *solus*, or “*alones*” of that age:

- Christ alone
- Faith alone
- Grace alone
- Scripture alone

It is my confidence in the sufficiency of Christ and the Word that frees me to believe such a discipleship movement can happen within almost any cultural-religious context. I believe thoroughly that grace alone, received through faith alone, placed in Christ alone, is fully sufficient for salvation. And I believe thoroughly that discipleship sustained and shaped by Scripture alone is sufficient to foster and sustain authentic movements of His Spirit.

Over the years, in my training and coaching of missionaries, I have coined the phrase, “the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to correct and lead the People of God.” This is a foundation and a model for “Kingdom movements to Jesus.” It is also a place where it seems possible for us to stand together, advocates and critics alike. 🌐

MBBs and MBs

The following, by a friend, captures well what I and others have seen:

Muslims coming to Christ fall into two broad categories:

MBBs is commonly used to mean “Muslim Background Believers”—those who choose to leave their Muslim identity and often their Muslim community and family as well. *Their family and friends either do not know about their faith (many are secret believers in relation to their families of origin) or see them as having rejected their family and joined a foreign religion and community. They frequently live outside of their birth countries or communities, having become believers in another context or having*

moved due to persecution. Muslim communities often see MBB family members as lost to them, resulting in increased community resolve not to let others be exposed to the message of Christ. If MBBs try to remain in their birth country as Christians, Christian communities within the Muslim countries may resist incorporating them because they fear persecution of their churches by the surrounding Muslim community. On the other hand, MBBs are sometimes praised by Western churches for leaving their families for the sake of their faith, while those who remain in their communities experience as much or more persecution.

MBs, or “Muslim Believers” is a term increasing used for Muslims coming to Christ who choose to remain in their birth communities and retain their birth identity. Many see their faith in Christ as a radical reinterpretation or reformation of their faith in Abraham’s God. Most are not “secret believers” and *their family and friends see them as Jesus Muslims, or a sort of new sect within Islam. Some are beaten or persecuted for speaking about Jesus and for using the Injil (New Testament). Their transformed lives and ongoing witness to their families has proved to be quite effective in many instances, in some cases leading to movements to Jesus.* 🌐