

REINTERPRETING THE “PROPHET” MUHAMMAD
FOR C5/INSIDER MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Today there are more than one billion Muslims in the world. This is the largest group of people that remains among the most resistant to the Christian message. Centuries of evangelistic attempts of the Church brought forth very insignificant fruit in terms of Muslim conversion to Christianity. However, a good number of articles have been circulating recently in missions periodicals describing a new phenomenon of ‘Muslim Christians’ or Messianic Muslims who may represent a turning point in Muslim outreach.

These Messianic Muslims, however, do not view themselves as ‘converts’ to Christianity but rather attempt to retain their cultural and religious identity as Muslims.¹ Similar trends are observed among the Hindu people. “In Madras (India) there are 200,000 Hindus and Muslims who worship Jesus – an amount equal to the total number of Christians in that city!”²

Such people movements toward Jesus Christ apart from the traditional manner of converting to ‘Christianity’ are labeled by missiologists and theologians as *Insider Movements*.³ A seemingly new phenomenon in the history of Christian mission, insider movements (IM for all future references) ignited a reaction of both praises and criticism amongst evangelical circles. There is an on-going debate about the legitimacy of IM. Missiologist Gary Corwin aptly remarked “. . . it is vitally important that the issues and

¹ Rick Brown, *A movement to Jesus within Islam*, Mission Frontiers, July-August 2008.

² John and Anna Travis, *Insider Movements*, Mission Frontiers, September-October 2005. Travis contrasts Christians of the traditional form of Christianity with Messianic Muslim and Hindu followers of Christ. This distinction, however, relates primarily to a socio-cultural expression of faith rather than to doctrinal incompatibilities.

³ Ibid.

questions related to Insider Movements be given the most thoughtful and prayerful consideration of which we are capable.”⁴

Among the key objections to IM is the fact that some Messianic Muslims continue to recite the central Muslim creed, *shahada*, which emphasizes the apostleship of Muhammad. The purpose of this research paper is to explore this much debated issue concerning the possibility of making a biblical case for shahada. How should Messianic Muslims view Muhammad and the main authoritative Islamic source, the Qur’an? As one of the key IM proponents wrote “the role of Muhammad and the Qur’an . . . will perhaps be the most challenging task of C5 (IM),”⁵ this research represents some initial steps in this major task.

The method of this study is threefold: 1) to establish a precedent for reinterpreting shahada; 2) to explore biblical ‘messengers’ outside of the Abrahamic covenant; 3) to synthesize an alternative perspective on Muhammad and the Qur’an within the context of IM.

The proposed study is significant because of its potential contribution to the development and future direction of IM among the growing Muslim population. The new perspective presented in this paper may not only help IM stay within healthy boundaries of the biblical teaching but also enable Messianic Muslims to have a greater influence within the broader Muslim community.

⁴ Gary Corwin, *A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions*, IFJM, Vol 24:1 Spring 2007.

⁵ John Travis, *Must all Muslims Leave ‘Islam’ to follow Jesus*, Evangelical Missions Quarterly 34:4, October 1998.

CHAPTER 1

WHY INSIDER MOVEMENTS?

Unsuccessful past

Christianity was successfully spreading during the first five centuries AD despite a long period of severe persecution and multiple theological schisms. Having become “the religion of the old nations of the Roman Empire,”¹ it was gaining momentum for a wider expansion. However, the unexpected rise of Islam in the beginning of the 7th century not only interrupted further growth of Christianity but also imposed a major challenge to the unique truth claim of the Christian faith. “Indeed, in the nine hundred years between the opening of the seventh and the beginning of the sixteenth century, Islam won from Christianity a larger proportion of the latter's adherents and territory than any other rival ever has succeeded in doing.”²

Christian Response to Islam

The history of Christian response to Islam is full of blemished spots. The Eastern Byzantine Church took a defensive position trying to protect herself from being eradicated by Islam. That wing of Christianity was more concerned with survival rather than impact on Islam. Western Christianity, on the contrary, took an offensive position by launching Crusades and later by being involved in colonization of Islamic societies.

¹ Park G. Fisher, *History of Christian Church*, 144.

² Kenneth S. Latourette, *The Thousand Years of Uncertainty*, Vol. II, 286.

Neither of these attitudes could attract many Muslims to Christ. One must admit, therefore, that on a large scale Christian response to Islam represented a poor reflection of Christ's love.

In the history of the Church, however, there were some intentional attempts to present Christian faith to Muslims in a proper way. Among those were Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226), Raymond Lull (c. 1232-1315), Henry Martyn (c. 1781-1812), Samuel Zwemer (c. 1868-1952) and others who were excellent models of the Christian witness. It is important to continue learning from their experiences. However, in spite of a great spiritual power, their testimony, for the most part, was also rejected by Muslims.

Modern Mission

Many developments of the 20th century enabled the Church to reach out to Muslims with increased intensity. Numerous accounts of conversions to Christ have been seen as a result. However, instead of the anticipated multiplying effect of the Gospel, Church growth is seriously stunted by the social and political opposition. For example, “on a long run, the Protestant missionaries' pursuit of Muslim evangelization provoked so much ill-will among Egyptian and Sudanese Muslim populations that it stimulated a nationalist and Islamic backlash.”³

Brother Andrew in one of his books describes what happens to Muslims who convert to Christianity: “All people are looking at them as down cast because they are in minority. When these people want to testify for their living God they are hung and killed

³ Benjamin Soares, *Muslims-Christian Encounter in Africa*, 58.

and life is made so difficult for them that their children will die with hunger and disease.”⁴ Under such circumstances the Church growth is certainly impeded.

It appears that the era of modern missions demonstrated a greater enthusiasm and more opportunities for Muslim evangelism. However, due to a long history of negative Christian-Muslim relations traditional forms of Christianity have not experienced a steady and consistent growth among the bulk of the Muslim population.

Roots of Muslim Rejection of the Gospel

To justify the reasons why Muslims react negatively to the Christian message there is a tendency to believe that “if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing” (1Cor 4:3). Although spiritual reality is a significant element that prevents Muslims from coming to faith in Christ it seems premature to conclude that spiritual factors are the only cause of rejection. There is at least two other major elements that have created significant barriers for the Gospel to widely penetrate into Islamic circles.

Culture

The first element is anthropological.⁵ For many centuries Christianity was predominantly developing in the West. “Most Muslim writings on Christianity, regardless of the geographical location of the author portray it as a more or less exclusively Western phenomenon.”⁶ The majority of Western missionaries who were successful in Muslim conversions only reinforced this unfortunate misconception.

Muslim converts are ‘extracted’ from their natural social environment and placed into a foreign ‘church’ environment where their cultural and religious identity is

⁴ Brother Andrew, *Secret Believers: What Happens When Muslims Believe in Christ*, 258.

⁵ Charles Kraft, Charles “Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society” in *The Gospel and Islam: a 1978 Compendium*, ed. Don M. McCurry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1979), 114-28.

⁶ Lloyd Ridgeon, *Islamic interpretations of Christianity*, 180.

transformed to become ‘truly Christian’. Missionaries normally call this a ‘discipleship process’. As a result the Church produces ‘enlightened and free from cultural bondages’ disciples of Jesus Christ. However, “each convert extracted from his own cultural situation reinforces in the minds of Hindus and Muslims the misunderstanding that Christians are opposed to their cultural traditions. In this sense, one could defend the thesis that each convert won from these faiths at present actually represents a setback to winning large numbers from these communities.”⁷ Such a simple anthropological analysis raised a question of whether it is possible to come to faith in Christ without necessarily adopting a foreign cultural identity.

Theology

Muslims believe that Christianity is not only a Western religion but it is also a polytheistic religion. Trinitarian theology is misperceived by the majority of Muslims as tritheism⁸ which implies the existence of three gods. What made things more complicated and further misleading is the fact that Trinitarian teaching became deeply incorporated into the Gospel message preached by the traditional Church. When Christ is preached Trinitarian theology gets into the focal point. There is certainly nothing wrong with Trinitarian theology. However, this theological position became the second primary stumbling block for Muslims to give serious attention to the Gospel message. The concept of the Trinity is naturally misperceived by the unregenerate mind of a Muslim as polytheism.

⁷ H.L. Richard, *Is Extraction Evangelism Still the Way to Go?* Mission Frontiers, September-October 1996.

⁸ Timothy C. Tennet, *Christology in the Qur'an and its Implication for witnessing to Muslims*, EMS, 11, 49-64.

We need to remember that “Trinitarian theology comes from generations of reflection and controversy.”⁹ The question is not whether theological conclusions of the early Church are correct. It is simply a question of the process and the timing for the same theological convictions to develop among new believers in Christ from other people groups. Is it possible at the initial stage of *evangelism* to focus on the mere Gospel message of 1 Cor 15:3-4 concerning the meaning of Christ’s death, His resurrection and the authority of Scripture, without making intentional references to the orthodox *teaching* of more sophisticated theological issues? If the basics of Gospel become a stumbling block for Muslims there is nothing one can do about it. But it seems that it is much less the cross of Christ but mainly misconceptions about Christian theology that keeps many Muslims from paying heed to the Gospel message.

General Description of C5/IM

As we have seen the resistance toward changing religions and the huge gap between the Muslim and Christian communities, we feel that fighting the religion-changing battle is the wrong battle. We have little hope in our lifetime to believe for a major enough cultural, political and religious change to occur in our context such that Muslims would become open to entering Christianity on a wide scale.¹⁰

In 1998 John Travis proposed a C1-C6 spectrum describing churches in Muslim contexts in terms of their degree of contextualization.¹¹ A C1 church rejects contextualization in principle whereas C5 takes it to its maximum possible degree. (According to the spectrum, C6 churches are secret believers who do not gather as a

⁹ Andrew Ryder, *Following Christ Models of Discipleship in The New Testament*, 76.

¹⁰ John Travis, *Insider Movements*, Mission Frontiers, September-October 2005.

¹¹ John Travis, *Must All Muslims Leave Islam to Follow Jesus?* EMQ, 34(4): 411-415, 1998.

church for security reasons). Although the C-scale can only be an approximation it can be used as a helpful tool of addressing some differences. Kevin Higgins attempted to come up with a detailed working definition for C5/IM.

It is a growing number of family, individuals, clans and/or friendship-webs becoming faithful disciples of Jesus within the culture of their people group, including their religious culture. This faithful discipleship will express itself in culturally appropriate communities of believers who will also continue to live within as much of their culture, including the religious life of the culture, as is biblically faithful. The Holy Spirit, through the Word and through His people will also begin to transform His people and their culture, religious life and world view.¹²

On the one hand C5 is an expression of a Muslim faith in Christ that gave birth to a new community of Messianic Muslims. These Messianic Muslims can be compared with the first century church of Jerusalem¹³ when new believers preserved their cultural and religious identity attending the Temple and fulfilling other duties of the Mosaic law (Acts 21:20) but were true disciples of Jesus Christ. On the other hand some issues related to IM are similar to those of the first Gentile believers when the Gospel message was unprecedentedly operating anew within a foreign cultural and religious setting.¹⁴

In any case, C5/IM can be described as a *spiritual movement* that operates within Islamic cultural and religious circles. Because of such a unique characteristic of IM which seems to open a wide door for Islamic anti-biblical influences some missiologists like Phil Parshall tend to view IM as a syncretistic sub-Christian

¹² Kevin Higgins, *The Key To Insider Movements: The "Devoted's" of Acts*, IJFM, 21:4 Winter 2004.

¹³ John Ridgeway, *Insider Movements in The Gospels and Acts*, IJFM, Vol 24:2 Summer 2007.

¹⁴ Kevin Higgins, *Acts 15 and Insider Movements among Muslims: Questions, Process and Conclusion*, IJFM, 24:1 Spring 2007.

movement.¹⁵ Others, however, including leading missiologist of the 20th century Ralph Winter, tend to keep their attitude open to see how C5 movements will further develop.¹⁶

Major Strength of C5

C4 and C5 are fairly recent contextual approaches in Muslim evangelism that do not create a tension of renouncing previous *cultural* identity. The difference between the two is their attitude toward Islam. C4 tends to view Islam more negatively openly describing it as a false and corrupt religion. C4 encourages followers of Jesus to leave the mosque and be separated from any Muslim religious activity. The problem with a C4 approach is that it implies that Muslim culture and Islam as a religion are two separable entities. In reality however the two cannot be separated.

Since Islam is deeply ingrown into Muslim cultural identity C5 takes one step further by allowing converts to preserve their religious identity as well. Instead of criticizing, C5 tends to look for positive sides in Islam, confronting only those elements that are clearly anti-biblical. Perhaps that is why “the option of being a Messianic Muslim is one that many Muslims are willing to consider.”¹⁷ In that sense IM takes a position of influencing Islam from within.

One must admit, however, that questions concerning the legitimacy and the nature of this new phenomenon as IM still remain. On the one hand, we face a serious danger of promoting a heretical sub-Christian movement which might lead millions of

¹⁵ Phil Parshall, *Beyond the mosque: Christians within Muslim community*, 1985. Also see B. Grafas, *Evaluation of Scriptural Support For Insider Movements*, St. Francis Magazine N 4, Vol. II, March 2007.

¹⁶ G. Corwin, R. Winters, *An Extended Conversation About “Insider Movement”*, IJFM, January-February 2006.

¹⁷ Gary Corwin, *A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocate to Consider Ten Questions*, IFJM, Vol 24:1 Spring 2007.

Muslims astray. On the other hand, those millions without Christ are lost anyway and if the Church remains too cautious about potential dangers of syncretism, implementing only 'safe' but often impotent strategies, the situation will likely remain unchanged.

This paper is based on the hypothesis that God has begun to draw Muslims to Christ in an usual way. The task of the Church is to accommodate the initiative of the Holy Spirit into a cohesive spiritual movement, timely addressing every new challenge. For C5 to become a fully legitimate model in Muslim outreach certain issues like the question of Muhammad and his 'revelation' the Qur'an must be addressed and further elaborated. This will be the focus of this research paper.

CHAPTER 2

MUHAMMAD: A MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR C5

Prophet or False Prophet?

A wall that divides Muslims from non-Muslims is the central creed of Islam, *shahada*, which states that ‘there is no god but God and *Muhammad is God’s messenger.*’ Beginning from the ninth century Christians of the mainstream Christianity began to openly disagree with the second part of *shahada* for several major reasons. The historical Islamic record of Muhammad’s life, his character and his teaching provoked the Church to categorize Muhammad as a false prophet. Why has this question become an issue for IM?

Statement of the Issue

Among the key objections to IM is the fact that some Messianic Muslims continue to recite *shahada* which emphasizes the apostleship of Muhammad. Thus, they seem to cross the boundary of the traditional Christian view. However, what is the real issue here? Is it simply breaking with some Christian traditions or are there some truly dangerous consequences of agreeing with *shahada*?

It seems that for the Church the real issue has always been a question of what one believes about Jesus the Messiah. Who is Jesus for Messianic Muslims? Is there a connection between this question and *shahada*? The concerns seems to come from the traditional understanding that *shahada* implies a new revelation of God, the Qur’an, which in turn has its own description of Jesus. So the real issue seems to be the ultimate

source of guidance for Messianic Muslims. *Is it possible to recite shahada (with a clear conscience) and view the Bible as the only divine source of guidance?* The rest part of this paper is an attempt to make an evaluation of such a possibility with a proposal for a positive answer.

Why make this Attempt?

The essence of this proposal is to *reinterpret* shahada and make biblical evaluation of the new interpretation of shahada. It is not playing with the meaning of the words. Such a proposal has two major goals of a large scope. First, it is an attempt to prevent IM from syncretism. Second, it reflects the potential influence Messianic Muslims can bring into the whole Muslim society.

Here is a response of some key proponents of IM to the question why Messianic Muslims continue to recite shahada. Brother Yusuf, a practitioner of C5, says that “what we have found in actuality is that saying the *shahada* does not harm the believer’s witness to Jesus. On the contrary, it gives him a hearing . . . What one believes about Muhammad is of little consequence.”¹ In the same article Rick Brown said:

. . . as for those who say the *shahada*, they represent a whole range of views with regard to what they mean by it, if anything at all. For some it is a belief which they have simply never questioned and so they accept both the Bible and the Qur’an as holy books. But for many Muslims, both Messianic and secular, saying the *shahada* is a social ritual that affirms one’s membership in the community.²

It seems that for Messianic Muslims shahada represents a connecting point between them and the rest of the Muslim community. If they choose to dogmatically reject shahada as the rest of the Christian community does, Messianic Muslims will likely

¹ Gary Corwin, *A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocate to Consider Ten Questions*, IFJM, Vol 24:1 Spring 2007.

² Ibid.

become ‘outsiders’ and their potentially great influence will be diminished if not completely terminated. However, if they fully accept shahada in its existing traditional understanding it will certainly welcome negative elements of syncretism. So in order for Messianic Muslims to have a greater impact they should neither reject nor fully accept shahada.

Ethical Question

“Some C5 proponents advocate giving the word *rasullah* (God’s messenger) a private meaning, something far less than its normal and accepted meaning.”³ For Waterman ‘this raises a question of integrity’ in light of 2 Cor 4:2 where Paul renounces any kind of deception in preaching Christ. The Scripture is very clear that God does not need His servants to use ethically questionable approaches in the effort of bringing people to Christ.

The foundational biblical principle for this whole issue of reinterpreting shahada is found in 1Cor 9:19-23 and Acts 17:16-31 where there is a description of Paul’s flexibility for the purpose of being relevant to his listeners. For the Jews Paul was like a Jew and in speaking with Greeks Paul reinterpreted their poets to introduce the Gospel message. Did Paul wrestle with ethical questions in choosing this approach?

In Acts 16:3 Paul circumcised Timothy for the sake of the Jews among whom they were planning to minister. Paul understood the very same act of circumcision totally differently from the majority of the Jewish community. In fact, for Paul circumcision was nothing (Gal. 6:15). However, for the sake of the people to whom he was sent to bring the Gospel he was open to bear with ideas that were not completely true. Was Paul

³ L.D. Waterman, *Do the Roots Effect the Fruits?* IJFM, 24:2 Summer 2007.

unethical when he did that? It seems that for Paul it was not an issue of ethical integrity but rather of relevancy and avoidance of unnecessary offense to the people's cultural and religious feelings.

Messianic Muslims grew up reciting shahada on a daily basis. For them it is not an ethical problem to accept Muhammad as rasullah (God's messenger) who was fulfilling God's mission. What is more important is to make a clarification of how one understands Muhammad's mission.

Reinterpretation of Shahada

Reinterpretation of shahada has a precedent in the Muslim community. All the attempts of Christians in the past to challenge the central Islamic creed were rebuffed by the Muslims on the account of the outsider character of their critical opponents. The majority of Muslims in the past were instructed by the Islamic tradition not to question the validity and divine character of Muhammad's mission. However, Messianic Muslims represent a case when these questions could be intelligently asked from the inside.

Two Extremes

In light of the Islamic interpretation of shahada all Muslims are supposed to believe there is only one God (Allah) and Muhammad was *the* messenger⁴ of God who was commissioned by the angel Gabriel with a special mission. God dictated to Muhammad His last revelation which was later recorded in a book, the Qur'an, because all the previous revelations such as the Bible were corrupted by humans. In that sense Muhammad is the seal of all the prophets (*khatam al-nabiyyin*, Qur'an 33:40) 'whose

⁴ The English translation using definite article 'the' is chosen primarily due to the Islamic traditional interpretation of shahada. However, this translation of the second part of shahada into English is not correct. The definite article 'the' before the word 'messenger' is not present in the original Arabic phrase. A more literal translation should be 'Muhammad is God's messenger'.

revelation superseded all the previous revelations of God.’⁵ Thus, the Qu’ran is the only remaining trustworthy revelation of God for all the humankind.

It is important for our study to indicate that such an interpretation of shahada is not based on the Qur’an. Islamic elaborate interpretation of a simple creed is primarily derived from other Islamic sources which constitute the Islamic tradition. It is obvious that Islamic tradition represents one extreme of how it portrays Muhammad and the Qur’an in light of shahada.

In reaction Christians were provoked with another extreme of a purely negative and confrontational view of Islam and, in particular, of Muhammad. Such an attitude began to emerge in the writings of several Byzantine historians in the early 9th century and later dominated the Church for many centuries. Theophanes the Confessor (c. 813) whose work was carried further by Nicetus of Byzantine describes Muhammad as an 'impudent impostor' and states that his so-called revelation comes from the Devil. “In short, Muhammad was an ignorant charlatan who succeeded by imposture in seducing the ignorant barbarian Arabs into accepting a gross, blaspheming, idolatrous, demoniac religion, which is full of futile errors, intellectual enormities, doctrinal errors and moral aberrations.”⁶ Western Christianity, in general, subscribed to this extreme position too.⁷

So there are two extreme interpretations of the second part of shahada: the traditional Islamic view that leads to extraordinary elevation of Muhammad and the Qur’an, and the traditional Christian view that places Muhammad under a category of a

⁵ Emory C. Bogle, *Islam. Origin and Belief*, 28.

⁶ Goddard Hugh, *A History of Christian-Muslims Relations*, 58 (Meyendorff 1964, 113-32).

⁷ Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, 4.

‘false prophet and forerunner of the Antichrist.’⁸ Even though Messianic Muslims are pressed to choose between one of these two extremes it seems that the shahada statement in its original form does not necessitate making such a choice. Does shahada allow an alternative hypothesis⁹ that neither affirms the supremacy of Muhammad’s mission nor places him under a category of an imposter or a false prophet?

Introducing the New Position

In the history of the church there were a number of prominent Christian scholars who acknowledged at least some common ground between Muslims and Christians. Paul of Antioch (c. 1263), the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Sidon, wrote a 'Letter to a Muslim' which widely circulated among the Christian community of the Middle East. “Paul did not accuse the Prophet of being an impostor or liar. . . He recognized that Muhammad had a religious mission. However his mission was not universal and hence did not include Christians who had already received a superior message, namely the law of Christ. Muhammad was sent to the ignorant Arabs who were living in darkness and who had never received a prophet before him.”¹⁰

An Anglican scholar and Islamist of the 20th century Montgomery Watt who fully accepts Christianity as expressed in the ecumenical creeds, after spending forty years of reflection about Islam and its origin, makes a bold conclusion that Muhammad was a genuine prophet.¹¹ His argument is mainly based on the general positive influence

⁸ Clinton Bennett, *In Search of Muhammad*, 28

⁹ Alternative hypothesis is the "hypothesis that the restriction or set of restrictions to be tested does not hold."

¹⁰ Goddard Hugh, *A History of Christian-Muslims Relations*, 58.

¹¹ Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, 61.

of Muhammad on the lives ‘of countless ordinary people who have been enabled to live decent and moderately happy lives.’ However, though Watt believed that Muhammad was ‘genuinely inspired by God’ not ‘all [his] revelations . . . were infallible.’”¹² In other words, Watt affirms shahada but rejects the inerrancy of the Qur’an.

Another prominent Christian scholar Hans Kung who also claims to hold an orthodox view on Christianity writes: “Muhammad . . . can be accepted as an authentic prophet, though at the same time (like all prophets) he had his human limitations and weaknesses.”¹³ Kung is basically doing the same thing as Watt. Instead of completely rejecting shahada both of the scholars attempt to redefine it. The majority of evangelical scholars will have a number of objections to these conclusions which will be partly addressed in the next chapter. The purpose of this section, however, is to indicate that among Christian scholars of mainstream Christianity there is more than one attitude to Muhammad as God’s messenger.

Guidelines for the New Position

There are two critical issues that are involved in reinterpretation of shahada: the role of Muhammad and the authority of the Qur’an. If these two issues are properly dealt with in light of biblical revelation Messianic Muslims have a solid foundation to influence the rest of the Muslim community as insiders. Chapter three of this paper is devoted to test the new position in light of the Scripture. What is important is to set up some parameters which will safeguard Messianic Muslims from syncretism on both sides.

¹² Clinton Bennett, *In search of Muhammad*, 225.

¹³ Ibid., (Kung 1997:93).

The first element in the new shahada should be the denial of the Islamic traditional understanding of Muhammad as *the* Messenger of God and the Qur'an is the last divine revelation. These two claims are clearly counter-biblical. In fact, in this sense Islamic tradition, not shahada, acts as an antithesis to Christianity and thus it must be rejected. However, Messianic Muslims should not completely reject all Islamic sources but be selective in order to make their proposal defensible before the larger Muslim audience. Choosing some Muslim authoritative sources that speak in support of the new interpretation of shahada will validate the claim.

The second element that must be introduced in the new shahada is the centrality and the focus on the 'previous revelations' that is the Bible. This second element is the most important in the alternative hypothesis of Muhammad's mission which presupposes that Muhammad's major role was to affirm the authenticity of the Bible. Qur'an in this regard should not be viewed as a substitute to the Bible but as a document that most vehemently defends the Bible.

And finally, the new shahada must articulate that Muhammad did not have a divine mission but was only allowed by God to have a wide influence for the purpose that Muhammad was not clearly aware of. While Muhammad was fulfilling his mission of establishing Islam, God in His sovereign plan was preparing a large community of Muslims for an unprecedented response to the Gospel message. In that sense Muhammad's mission was to 'prepare the soil' for the Gospel seed as a fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham concerning the Messiah. This new perspective should involve a mega shift of a paradigm on Muhammad and Islam in light of God's sovereign plan of drawing a large Muslim community to faith in the Messiah.

A Paradigm Shift in Ministries to Muslims

In the history of the Church there were periods when God called His people to move beyond the traditional thinking of their days. Barnabas and Paul were called to focus their ministry efforts on the group of people that for many centuries were viewed as unclean and not worthy of God. This calling was so radical that even Jewish Christians of Jerusalem were offended by such proposition (Acts 22:22). Yet Paul insisted that such shift of a paradigm in the Jewish traditional thinking was necessary in light of the clear evidence of the Holy Spirit's work among the Gentiles. When Martin Luther penned his 95 thesis of why he disagreed with some of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church it was the beginning of another shift of a paradigm in the traditional thinking of the Church. Changing a position on Muhammad might be very challenging for many people in the Church. For clarification purposes this whole discussion must be viewed in the context of the Messianic Muslim community among whom God seems to have begun His work in a special way. Different means are implemented by God in His redemptive plan. No matter how negatively the Church has been viewing Muhammad in the past God is able to use his (Muhammad's) influence for His redemptive purposes. However, if the Church continues to be silent or confrontational regarding Muhammad as was the case for a long period of time she will further distance herself from many people whose identity is 'ingrown' in their prophet. Instead of futile debates with Muslims about their 'false prophet', let us rather find ways to turn their attention to some true statements of Muhammad written in the Qur'an, especially as it concerns the Bible.

This is a major shift of a paradigm which advocates the idea that Muhammad, who was viewed negatively for such a long period of time by the majority representatives

of the Church, should no longer be viewed as a rival of Christ but as a person whose influence may become instrumental in advancing the Gospel among the Muslims.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON NON-BIBLICAL PROPHETS.

Biblical Prophets of the Old and New Testaments

Part of the process in determining the validity of IM should involve continual feedback from the Scriptures. Missiologist Kevin Higgins proposed several topics that must be further explored through an exegetical and missiological study. One of his suggested themes was “the role of non-Jewish ‘prophets’ in the Bible . . .” He believes that “. . . these can help us evaluate possible understandings of Muhammad.”³⁶

A thorough biblical exegesis of such broader subjects demands further research beyond the limits of this paper. In this paper there will be only some basic guidelines for a position on Muhammad as *rassul* (a messenger) in light of biblical criteria. This initial attempt to biblically evaluate a positive perspective on Muhammad will address basic theological and historical objections. The main emphasis of this section is to position Messianic Muslims in their attitude to Muhammad in such a way that it would both safeguard them against syncretism and increase their potential for wider influence in the Muslim community. It is admitted that additional clarifications and refinement in such an endeavor are necessary as this paper presents only a direction of thought. Therefore, a final proposed alternative view of this paper should receive further constructive feedback and modifications.

³⁶ Kevin Higgins, *Acts 15 and Insider Movements among Muslims: Questions, Process and Conclusion*, *IJFM*, 24:1 Spring 2007.

Early Church View of Muhammad's Mission

It is notable to trace what the Church initially believed about Muhammad prior to developing in the ninth century a clearly negative picture that excluded any possibility of the divine presence in Muhammad's mission. This early view could be divided by three main strains.

The first strain was a belief that Islam came as a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 21:12-13 concerning his son Ishmael.³⁷ Although it could be argued that the promised great nation is the Arabs whom Muhammad united in one community, it is hard to make a strong biblical case for such an interpretation. The second strain suggested that it was God's judgment of the heretical Christianity which was widely spread in the East. Many of those heresies are actually confronted by the Qur'anic verses.³⁸ With the coming of Islam Eastern Christian heresies did not continue to be widely spread. In that sense Muhammad's influence was instrumental in constraining heretical Christianity. And, finally, John of Damascus who lived among Muslims and who is considered the last of the Fathers of the Eastern Church believed that Islam was a Christian heresy.³⁹ This view represents the third and most widely accepted strain of thought. In some sense, by attempting to constrain heretical Christianity, Islam became the ultimate form of heretical Christianity. Very importantly, however, is the fact that "John does not use the term 'forerunner of the Antichrist' to refer to Muhammad

³⁷ J. Moorhead, *The Earliest Christian Theological Response to Islam*, Religion, 256.

³⁸ Timothy C. Tennet, *Christology in the Qur'an and its Implication for witnessing to Muslims*, EMS, 11, 49-64.

³⁹ Goddard Hugh, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 40.

personally, but to Islam in general. In this he differs from some later Christian writers who do personalize the epithet.”⁴⁰

In the new conditions of greater political tension a more negative view on Muhammad and his religion took the wide precedence. However, it seems that the early response of the Church concerning Muhammad did not exclude a divine hand behind his devastating influence as was the case described in the first chapter of the book of Habakkuk.

Short Exposition of Habakkuk 1, 2

The book of Habakkuk was written as an expression of God’s judgment in response to Israel’s disobedience. The Lord says to Habakkuk in 1:6 “for behold, *I am raising up* the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs (NASB).” Habakkuk is perplexed: how could God, who is ‘too pure to look on evil’ (1:13), appoint such a ruthless nation to execute judgment on people more righteous than themselves. The devastating army of Nebuchadnezzar described by Habakkuk was fulfilling a divine ordinance even though they thought they were doing that by the strength of their god (1:11). The culminating point, however, is the assured promise of God about an appointed time when the corrupt destroyer will himself be destroyed and God will reverse his devastating influence to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory.

There is a striking similarity in the description of how Nebuchadnezzar and Muhammad were spreading their influence. Both were involved in military campaigns and gained tremendous success in conquering many nations. Jeremiah calls

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Nebuchadnezzar the servant of God (Jer. 25:9, 27:6, 43:10) though the origin and the character of Nebuchadnezzar are very disputable. How should we understand that? It seems the biblical text is clear that God's hand was behind Nebuchadnezzar even though he did not know the God of Israel. What is important for us is to observe here that God raises people outside of His covenant for the accomplishment of His purposes. Can we call Nebuchadnezzar God's messenger? Was he not deliberately sent by God to accomplish God's purpose of Israel's judgment?

Covenantal and para-covenantal messengers

After eleven chapters of the Bible that described the irreversibly lost condition of humankind there is an introduction of the redemptive plan of God which He began by making a promise to Abram to bless all the nations through Abram's seed (Gen 12:1). Most of the key figures of the remaining parts of the Old Testament are instrumental agents who played different roles in the fulfillment of that promise. The promise was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ and, therefore, it is appropriate to call all the people who directly and inspirationally (1Pet 1:10) pointed to Christ before or after His coming as God's messengers. But what about people who were not inspired by the Holy Spirit in the same way as the writers of the Scriptures but who also carried out God's ordinances to help fulfill the promise given by God to Abraham? In what sense can those people be called God's messengers?

Cyrus, a great King of Persia, is mentioned in the Old Testament as God's anointed (Isa 45:1). Even though Cyrus was not in lineage with the Abrahamic covenant God anointed him and accomplished His purposes through Cyrus. Can Cyrus be called God's *rassul* (messenger)? A number of other people like Melchizedek, Rahab, Jethro,

and Nebuchadnezzar had no direct connection with the Messianic promise and yet they made a significant contribution for the fulfillment of God's promise given to Abraham. How do we biblically define those characters? They are, certainly, not in the same category with God's messengers who were inspired by the Holy Spirit for the recording of the Scripture. But does this exclude a possibility of naming them God's messengers at all? Balaam is a biblical case study who was called a 'prophet' (2 Pet. 2:16), but who, because of his treacherous behavior, received a rebuke from God through his donkey. In this case even a donkey seemed to fulfill a role of God's messenger. It seems that the Bible does not give a very clear definition for the term 'God's messenger' (rassullah).

Part of a synthesis process for a new perspective on Muhammad should be accompanied by new definitions. For our case study it is important to create a scripturally defensible definition for God's messenger. Here is a proposed definition: God's messenger is someone who consciously or subconsciously fulfills the redemptive plan of God. This definition is very broad but it does fit well to the Muslim understanding of the term. For example, according to the Qur'an, besides a number of biblical prophets there is mentioning of Alexander the Great and a Greek philosopher Aesop as God's messengers. So can we say that if a historical figure of the past makes a definite contribution in the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan he may be legitimately called as God's messenger?

Objections for viewing Muhammad as God's messengers

As mentioned in the beginning of the previous chapter, there are many objections both theological and historical to view Muhammad as one of God's

messengers. First of all, Muhammad as a person did not meet some basic criteria to qualify for God's messengers. Secondly, admitting Muhammad as God's messenger will create serious theological problems in dealing with his message the Qur'an. And thirdly, Muhammad did not seem to fulfill any of the purposes in God's plan of redemption but on the contrary created only major barriers. How can someone even think about this idea?

Historical Objection

The first common objection is the *historical* record concerning the moral standards of Muhammad's life. Muhammad is charged with a number of gross sensual sins that he openly committed in his life. Islamic scholars do not hide those records but simply refuse to view them as sinful. But if we judge Muhammad by the moral standards of the New Testament he is certainly short of some basic requirements of being called God's servant.

This is not a strong objection because of a number of reasons. Moral standards as a biblical concept must be applied in the reality and context of human life. For example, King David raided caravans, killed many people and had many wives. However, he is not rebuked by God for any of those 'immoral' deeds. Moreover, David's son Solomon is an even greater example of the fact that God is not limited to fulfill His plans despite moral weakness of a person. Who would disqualify Solomon from being called God's messenger? Therefore pointing to the moral weaknesses of Muhammad is not a sufficient reason to disqualify him of any possibility to be called God's messenger. Besides, a closer look at the life of Muhammad led some Christian

scholars to the following conclusion: "From the standpoint of Muhammad's time the modern Western allegations for treachery and sensuality cannot be maintained. His contemporaries did not find him morally defective in any way."⁴¹

Theological Objection

If Muhammad were sent by God why do we have Islam with its core belief system very different from orthodox Christianity? How can God send a messenger whose teaching is in principle contrary to the Scriptural revelation? To fully discuss this question we must again recall our discussion about the devastating influence of the Islamic tradition. The image of Muhammad and 'his teaching' is clearly in opposition to the Scripture. Muhammad of the Islamic tradition deserves a full right to be called an anti-Christ. The critical question, however, is how adequately the Islamic tradition reflects historical Muhammad. Is it really true that the teaching of the Islamic tradition *is* the teaching of Muhammad? If the answer is yes, then our discussion should stop here and we should not attempt to make any further suggestions of viewing Muhammad as God's messenger.

However, Patricia Crone and Michel Cook pioneered a new approach in rediscovering the origin of Islam. They decided to step outside the Islamic traditional sources altogether and 'start anew' their academic research of Islam.⁴² What they discovered in their research surprised both Islamic and Christian scholarship. Their

⁴¹ Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, 229.

⁴² Patricia Crone, M. A. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, 10.

research is in the process of further reinvestigation and, if proved, it would be a revolutionary discovery for the whole world.

From the early pages of their book they talk about documents that Islamic tradition did not refer to in their understanding of the origin of Islam. For example, there is a mentioning of an historical anti-Jewish tract *Doctrina Iacobi* which reports that “the Prophet was preaching ‘the advent of the anointed one that is to come.’ That is to say that the core of the Prophet’s message in the earliest testimony available to us outside the Islamic tradition appears as Judaic Messianism. The idea is hardly familiar one but it is strikingly confirmed by the independent evidence.”⁴³ If nothing else this research opens a door to question the validity of how the Islamic tradition has been portraying Muhammad.

Muhammad

The quest for historical Muhammad (C. 570-632) is a very difficult task. Lack of written historical documents produced some pessimism concerning the possibility of reconstructing his biography. Much of what we know today about Muhammad's life is based on the oral tradition later recorded as the Hadith and other Islamic literature which many Christian scholars view as partially reliable.⁴⁴

The earliest writing of Muhammad's biography was made by Ibn Ishaq (704-767) who tried to put his material in a coherent story. That is almost hundred years after Muhammad’s death. But since that original work is not extant⁴⁵ the only standard sources

⁴³ Patricia Crone, M. A. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, 10.

⁴⁴ Harald Motzki, *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of Sources*, 14.

⁴⁵ Bennett Clinton, *In search of Muhammad*, 28.

for the biographies of Muhammad are the edited versions of Ishaq's original work. The earliest of them written by Ibn Hisham is dated around 833 AD.

It is surprising that among the majority of the Muslim and Christian scholars there is an agreement concerning the general soundness of the material preserved by the oral tradition and later recorded by Muslim historians. The problem, however, is the persisting gap in the historical evidence of the life of Muhammad which in fact gives an ample opportunity for “disagreement on how his life is to be understood.”⁴⁶

A recognized Arab Orthodox believer says: "I highly respect Muhammad. By this I mean the Muhammad of history. There is another Muhammad of tradition, this one I do not recognize."⁴⁷ So if most of our theological objections to Muhammad are triggered by the teaching of the Islamic tradition then as it was already indicated Messianic Muslims should not agree with it either. The proposal of this paper is to neutralize the Islamic view and propose a new Messianic view on Muhammad.

Qur'an as the Major Objection

When Paul was in Athens he quoted some Greek philosophers as a reference of authority to them. Paul even called some of those philosophers prophets (Tit 1:12). Did Paul agree with everything in the Greek poetry? Of course, not. But at least he agreed with the true statements of Greek philosophers (Acts 17:28). At this stage of the development of the Messianic Muslim community rejecting the Qur'an is not the most appropriate thing because the Qur'an is their bridge of connection with the rest of the

⁴⁶ Bennett Clinton, *In search of Muhammad*, 33.

⁴⁷ This quote was made by a scholar who for security purposes wished to remain anonymous.

Muslim world. The Qur'an can be viewed as the altar 'to the unknown God' of Acts 17 that Paul used to connect with his audience. Apparently the altar did not have a divine origin but it served as a tool to communicate the divine message. To reject the Qur'an would be to reject a great bridge of connection with the largest unsaved group of people.

However, if Messianic Muslims acknowledge Muhammad as God's messenger should they not also view the Quran as divinely inspired Scripture? This is a strong argument from the logical point of view. One must admit that if a positive view on Muhammad as God's messenger will unavoidably lead to the agreement that God sent a new divine revelation then any attempt to reinterpret shahada are futile. Just like the sayings of the Greek philosophers the Qur'an by no means is divine source of guidance. It may only lead to the appreciation of what is called the Scriptures but it cannot replace or even be leveled with the Scripture.

This understanding will be developed gradually as Messianic Muslims continue to explore the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When a Muslim trusts Christ and the Holy Spirit is working in his life it becomes very obvious to him that the Bible is the only truly divine source of guidance. As Ralph Winter commented on this issue:

Can't we think of the Qur'an as we do the Apocrypha and let it gradually take a back seat to our Bible simply because it is not as edifying intellectually and spiritually? That will happen despite the emotional attachment Muslims have to its Arabic and its cadences. What a handicap the Qur'an has in comparison to the meaningful flow of drama in the Gospels! And what a handicap if, like the Latin Mass for so many centuries the Qur'an cannot and must not be translated into any other language! How can it ever compete with the Bible? Maybe the Torah and

the Injil simply need to be rediscovered within Islam the way the Bible has needed again and again to be rediscovered within Christian and Jewish history.⁴⁸

Islamic tradition which is full of false claims gives its own understanding of why Muhammad was sent. It is important to remember that much of what Islamic tradition says about Muhammad is not based on the Qur'an but on the tradition itself because the Qur'an is not the best biographical source for Muhammad.⁴⁹ It seems that if one uses only the Qur'an it is quite possible to come up with an interpretation different from the Islamic view of Muhammad's mission.

Due to ignorance there is a general strong conviction among Christians that the message of the Qur'an is diametrically opposed to the biblical revelation. Therefore appealing to the Qur'an may create a serious theological problem. However, the plain reading of the Qur'an without its interpretation by the Islamic tradition may lead to one of the following conclusions. '... the Quran declares that it (the Qur'an) was given to confirm the previous revelations and not to replace them. This confirmation is repeated in many parts of the Qur'an (Surah 2:89, 2:101, 5:48, 6:92 and 46:12).'⁵⁰

One may assume that only Christians make such observations. But here is what a traditional Muslim scholar writes:

How many times did the Apostle (Muhammad) remind his listeners that he was not bringing them any novelties but merely continuing in the path of the earlier apostles, those of the Israelites, starting from Abraham. . .He constantly stressed that what he was bringing them 'confirmed' what they already possessed and what the Israelites had already received.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ralph Winter, Steven Hawthorne, *Going Too Far? Perspectives on The World Christian Movement : a Reader*, 667.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁰ Samy Tanagho, *Glad News! God Loves You, My Muslim Friend*, 8.

⁵¹ Abdelmajid Sharfi, *Islam Between Divine Message and History*, 4.

This does not, however, mean that all the material written in the Qur'an is in full agreement with the biblical record. Numerous discrepancies occur and some of them may represent major theological problems. At this stage, however, what is important is to show that even Muslims are ready to acknowledge that the Qur'an speaks very highly of the Bible. Why Muslims then do not read the Bible? The answer is very simple: Islamic tradition that claims that the Bible has been changed.

A Messenger for the Messiah

Having dealt with some historical and theological objections let us proceed with the question about Muhammad's role in God's plan of redemption. So far there seemed to be only negative influence of Muhammad for the life of the Church. Is there any positive role of Muhammad in the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption?

First of all, we must address an issue of blaming Muhammad for a billion of people who are now Muslims and not Christians. Is this another way of justifying the failure of the Church to properly evangelize the nations? The blame for the unevangelized must first of all be attributed to the Church and not somebody else. Had the Church properly fulfilled the Great Commission Muhammad could have been a Christian or at least Islam would not be so widely spread.⁵²

The major contribution of Muhammad for the advancement of the Messiah is yet to be seen. What has been done so far is a large community of people who believe in the unity of God and a book with a clear reference for the authority of the Bible. This

⁵² W. H. T. Gairdner, *The reproach of Islam*, (1909).

community of people has been resistant to ‘convert’ to any established form of ‘Christianity’ but in the nutshell of their worldview they are well prepared to hear the Gospel message if it is presented in a culturally and theologically relevant way. Messianic Muslims are the first fruit to discover such readiness. In this sense Muhammad can be viewed as a pre-messianic messenger whose mission was similar to the mission of John the Baptist.⁵³ Thus, Messianic Muslims may boldly proclaim *shahada* as an indication that Muhammad was God’s messenger sent to prepare a way for the Messiah.

⁵³ Rick Brown, *Biblical Muslims*, IJFM, 24:2 2007.

CHAPTER 4

SYNTHESIS OF A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Summarizing Discussed Ideas

In this paper there was an introduction of why the task of Muslim evangelism continues to represent a major challenge for the Church. Literature analysis indicates an emerging and growing insider movement that addressed the two major barriers preventing Muslims from coming to faith in Christ. The key strength of this movement which gave birth to a new community of Messianic Muslims is its potential ability to operate within Islamic cultural and religious structures (so to speak a church within a mosque). The idea of this model is in some way paralleled with the church of Jerusalem, which was originally identified by the Jews as a Nazarene sect (Acts 24:5) and was developing within cultural and religious structures of Judaism.

The major challenge for this model of working among Muslims is the danger of syncretism that could be resulted from combining Islamic traditional teaching with the biblical revelation. As the five pillars of Islam, including the central Islamic creed are further exercised by some Messianic Muslims it created much tension with a broader Christian community to accept the legitimacy of IM. The task of this thesis was to reconcile this tension by proposing to reinterpret shahada and to present a new perspective on Muhammad. The new perspective is different from the traditional

Christian view on Muhammad as the enemy of Christ. This should enable Messianic Muslims remain insiders in the Muslim circles. But it is also different from the traditional Islamic view on Muhammad as someone who brought ‘a superior revelation’. This should help prevent Messianic Muslims from syncretistic influences of the false religion. Maintaining this balance is a key for a healthy growth of the Messianic Muslim community.

The proposed solution was to view Muhammad less confrontationally but with a clear distinction from the Islamic traditional understanding. Muhammad’s ‘prophetic message’ the Quran played a significant contribution for the formation of the Muslim community but it is not a divinely inspired Word of God. So the proposed solution was to agree with shahada but disagree with its Islamic interpretation. This solution was discussed in the view of the biblical revelation and some scholarly feedback.

Proposed perspective on Muhammad for C5/IM

As a historical figure Muhammad had a significant influence on the lives of many people. His major contribution was the initiation of the Muslim community that is characterized by the belief in one God who revealed Himself to Abraham and other prophets of the Old Testament, all of whom were preparing the way for the coming Messiah. Muhammad can be seen as God’s messenger who consciously and subconsciously was doing the same thing. Thus, the ultimate mission of Muhammad was to prepare people for the hearing of the Message concerning the Messiah. With such perspective on Muhammad Messianic Muslims are the ones who will complete his mission by actually bringing that Message to the rest of the Muslim community.

The Holy Qur'an is a book made of Muhammad's inspirational utterances served as a tool of accomplishing Muhammad's major task and is by no means a substitute of the Bible. The Quran is the best indicator of the Biblical authority and could be instrumental in leading Muslims to Christ because 'the end of the Law is Christ' (Rom. 10:4). Since Muhammad is not a divine messenger who was led by the Holy Spirit the Quran should not be viewed as an inerrant inspired Scripture. Therefore Messianic Muslims should treat Muhammad with respect but view him through a prism of Biblical authority.

Every Mosque for the Messiah

Another great achievement of Muhammad's role in preparing a large group of people to hear about the Messiah is an institution of the mosque. Today there is innumerable number of mosques and their number continues to daily grow with the growth of the Muslim population. This seemingly 'impeding thread' for the Christendom can actually become an opportunity for Messianic Muslims. Like in the New Testament times when synagogues played a crucial role as a platform for the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles so Messianic Muslims may use a mosque as a platform for their wide influence for Christ. The 'synagogue soil' was specifically preconditioned by its religious and social environment that allowed the Gospel seed to be planted very naturally and rapidly. It was as if God pre-ordained the existence of synagogues for the purpose of introducing His plan of redemption. Similarly, the reputation of a mosque as the right place of worship and learning about God has been establishing for centuries.

A striking parallel between the role of the synagogue in the first century and the role of the mosque for the Muslim people today is observed. Of course, there are a number of differences between those two structures. But the parallel is the potential contribution an establishment like a mosque can play for the spread of the Gospel message. When Muslims attend a mosque every Friday they come prepared to hear God's message. Can we envision a day when Messianic Muslims will take advantage of this situation and bring the Good News of salvation to every mosque?

CONCLUSION

Speaking about *shahada* could be a sensitive topic for over one billion people who believe that Muhammad was God's messenger. Such belief became an intrinsic part of a Muslim cultural and religious identity. Traditional Christian criticism of Muhammad and Islam is generally received by Muslims as a personal offense towards the origin of their identity. Thus, an attitude a person has towards the prophet of Islam determines whether a person is an insider or an outsider of the Muslim community.

In this paper there was made an evaluation of a possibility for a new born community of Messianic Muslims who by default are insiders to continue reciting shahada without compromising their allegiance to Christ. Fortunately Messianic Muslims unlike many traditional Christians of our days are not struggling with questions of Biblical authority or the meaning of Christ's death and His bodily resurrection. The major struggle for Insider Movement is the incorporation of their new faith in the Messiah in the context of the existing cultural and religious community where Muhammad and the Qur'an are playing a central role. It was indicated that abrupt denial of the latter will not only hinder the organic process of incorporation of biblical faith into Muslim society but also will jeopardize IM from having a significant contribution in the Muslims world.

Therefore the proposal of this evaluation was to take a neutral position on Muhammad by reinterpreting shahada in light of the biblical revelation and historical

data. Thus, reciting or not reciting shahada becomes less of an issue but how one interprets it is what really matters. The traditional Islamic interpretation of shahada must yield to a new Messianic view where Muhammad's role as God's messenger is understood the one who was instrumental in preparing a way for the Messiah Jesus.

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