

CAMEL METHOD: HELPFUL OR HERESY?

by

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## THE CAMEL METHOD: HELPFUL OR HERESY?

### **A Very Hot Topic**

In the past decade, the church has witnessed attempts by prominent Christian leaders to reach out to Muslim communities with the good news of Jesus Christ. These attempts have been met by skepticism by some within the church, and have given rise to a heated debate on what constitutes a proper methodology for evangelism to Muslims. This controversy has been ignited by fears within the church of a “Chrislam” religion which attempts to merge the common beliefs of Christianity and Islam into a new, unified belief system.

### **Fears of “Chrislam”**

Chrislam, indeed, has recently emerged as a real religion. It was founded in 1970 by former real-estate broker Samsindeen Saka in Nigeria. It is the first official religious movement to combine both religions.

Although the movement is officially known as *Oke Tude* (Yoruba for “Mountain of Losing Bondage”), it is commonly known in Lagos as “Chrislam”. Samsindeen Saka, the movement’s fifty-year-old Yoruba founder who was born Muslim, preaches, “We’re all children of Abraham.” According to his approximately one thousand followers, it is “natural” for Christianity and Islam to overlap. *Oke Tude/Chrislam* is an intriguing case for exploring Christian-Muslim multifarious encounters in that its worshippers recognize both the Bible and Qur’an as holy texts, pray to Jesus Christ and the Prophet Muhammad for forgiveness and support, sing Christians hymns about Jesus and Islamic songs eulogizing the Prophet.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (Janson 2011, 3)

Despite the fact that Saka's movement claims 1,500 followers and can hardly be considered a world religion, PBS gave it widespread attention in the United States when it ran a video report about the movement on its popular "Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly" program.<sup>2</sup>

### **Fears of Interfaith**

In addition to the fears brought on by rumors of a new Chrislam movement, the church has also witnessed recent attempts by interfaith groups to bring unity between the Christian and Muslim worlds. One well publicized initiative called "A Common Word" began in 2007 with the gathering of 138 religious leaders who expressed support over a document that highlighted the similarities between the two faiths. Gathering the attention of the New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Good Morning America, to name a few, it has been hailed as "the most successful Muslim-Christian interfaith initiative in history".<sup>3</sup>

### **Christian Leaders Beginning to Speak Out**

Prominent Christian figures have also begun to speak out on the topic.<sup>4</sup> For example, when well-known Christian pastor John Piper publically expressed criticism of the "Common Word" gathering, it only served to increase awareness of these movements. But arguably, what has raised most attention here in the United States are the activities of a handful of Christian leaders, including Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Lake Forrest, California.

At the close of President Obama's inauguration prayer, Pastor Rick Warren prayed in the name of "Isa" (the Qur'anic name for Jesus) in an apparent attempt to gain an open door with the Muslim community. The Christian world was set in an uproar and the Internet became ablaze of accusations that Rick Warren was promoting Chrislam.<sup>5</sup> Shortly afterwards PBS ran a

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<sup>2</sup> (In Nigeria, Christianity and Islam Combine 2009)

<sup>3</sup> (A Common Word n.d.)

<sup>4</sup> For a timeline of the controversy, see Appendix 1.

<sup>5</sup> (Kerby 2012, 5)

report on the spread of “Chrislam” in Nigeria, which compounded fears of a Rick Warren led conspiracy to promote Chrislam in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Further controversy erupted when Dr. Ergun Caner, then president of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, stated that the Camel Method (the subject of this paper) was heresy during the February 3, 2010 Southern Baptist podcast called SBC Today.<sup>7</sup> He emphatically stated that Southern Baptist International Missions Board president, Dr. Jerry Rankin, was “a liar for using it.” The New York Times caught wind of this dispute, and published an article entitled, “A Dispute on Using the Koran as a Path to Jesus”.<sup>8</sup> Caner later apologized for his personal attack against Rankin, but stated that he still held to a strong conviction that the Camel Method is deception.<sup>9</sup>

The controversy continued when televangelist Jack Van Impe spoke out against Rick Warren on his syndicated TV program in June, 2011, charging Warren of supporting Chrislam, which Van Impe stated was the coming one-world religion. When TBN refused to air a repeat broadcast of the program, Van Impe left TBN, ending his popular 25 year broadcast.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, Warren inadvertently continued to generate controversy when, in February, 2012, the Orange County Register published an article entitled, “Rick Warren Builds Bridge to Muslims”, where it was stated that Warren seeks “to end 1,400 years of misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians”.<sup>11</sup> The article opened with a statement that “Christians and Muslims worship the same God”, a phrase which some readers believed came from Warren

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<sup>6</sup> (In Nigeria, Christianity and Islam Combine 2009)

<sup>7</sup> (Allen 2010)

<sup>8</sup> (Openheimer 2010)

<sup>9</sup> (Allen, Seminary president apologizes for calling IMB head a liar 2010)

<sup>10</sup> (Banks 2011)

<sup>11</sup> (Hinch 2012)

during the interview. Warren responded by saying the reporter misquoted and misrepresented him.<sup>12</sup>

With fears of Chrislam on the rise, and the activity of popular Christian figures generating controversy within the church, clearly the manner in which the church attempts to build bridges into the Muslim community is a pertinent topic for today. What constitutes an acceptable evangelism method? Has the church compromised and gone too far in its approach? And is one of the current leading approaches, the Camel Method, indeed a heresy as Dr. Caner suggests?

### **“If It’s Broke, Fix It”**

Islam is arguably the fastest growing religion in the world.<sup>13</sup> When one considers the numbers, it is staggering. It is estimated that by 2030 the Muslim population will double from 1.1 to 2.2 billion people.<sup>14</sup> This growth is not just limited to the Middle East. Here in the United States, as educational institutions, the workforce, and local communities become more ethnically diverse, Christians are beginning to take notice of Muslims within their direct sphere of influence. USA Today reported, “While protests against new mosques in New York, Tennessee and California made headlines, the overall number of mosques quietly rose from 1,209 in 2000 to 2,106 in 2010.”<sup>15</sup> That is an increase of 74% since 2000. The spread of Islam can no longer be ignored. The question naturally arises, “How does a Christian effectively reach a Muslim for Christ?”

Historically, the church has had a poor track record witnessing to Muslims. Sadly, there have been very few converts from Islam to Christianity during the entire 1,400 years since

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<sup>12</sup> (Warren 2012)

<sup>13</sup> (Guinness World Records 2003, 203)

<sup>14</sup> (Jones 2011)

<sup>15</sup> Need to format this link: <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/story/2012-02-29/islamic-worship-growth-us/53298792/1>

Mohammed.<sup>16</sup> Samuel Zwemer, known as the Apostle to Islam during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pondered the ineffectiveness of the church to reach the Muslim world in his day, when he observed that the efforts of 438 missionaries yielded no more than 150 converts. He was forced to ask the question, “Why So Few Converts in Islam?”<sup>17</sup> Rankin expresses this same frustration exists today when he stated, “There is the story of the missionary in the Middle East who had been there for 20 years and had never won a Muslim to faith in Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

### **The Need for Something Better**

In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded his followers to, “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). As followers of Jesus who will give an account to their Master, Christians must face the challenges of bringing the gospel to those peoples, groups, and religions that are hostile to the message. The Bible makes it clear that it is not acceptable to give up on a people group because of great resistance or persecution.<sup>19</sup> Because of this, one may argue that the church has a moral obligation to consider new approaches to witnessing that are more effective, provided they do not make theological compromises.

### **Recent Breakthroughs**

Thankfully, it would appear that God is beginning to do a new work. In a recent article with Mission Frontiers, Kevin Greeson, author of the Camel Method, stated that since he

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<sup>16</sup> (Greeson 2010)

<sup>17</sup> (Reynolds 2011)

<sup>18</sup> (Harris 2007)

<sup>19</sup> See Acts 4:3-22; 5:17-42; 8:3; 9:2; 9:23-24; 12:1-5; 13:44-51; 14:5-6; 14:19-20; 16:16-24; 17:1-15; 18:12-17; 19:23-41; 20:19; 23:12-14.

began working with Muslims in 1997 there has been a sudden increase in Muslims coming to faith in Christ.

By 2010, we could identify at least 25 Muslim populations that had seen at least 1,000 baptisms and/or 100 churches planted over the previous decade. Of those 25 movements, a dozen reported more than 3,000 baptized former Muslims, some as many as 300,000 converts from Islam... Between December 1999 and May 2002, these six emerging church-planting movements saw approximately 4,500 Muslims come to faith in Christ and baptism and 315 new house churches formed. By 2009, each of these six movements has surpassed 2,000 baptisms. The largest of the six movements has seen 7,290 baptisms with 545 new house churches.<sup>20</sup>

While attempts by missionaries to reach Muslims in these same countries in the 30 years prior had yielded only a handful of converts, it would appear based on these new numbers that God is doing a new work. Greeson identified the key factors which have helped to bring about a new season of success as (1) the attacks of 9/11<sup>21</sup> and (2) the emergence of new contextualization resources. Such resources include the recent publication of a contextualized Muslim-friendly Bible and a contextualized version of the Jesus film. It is interesting that while the Camel Method is a contextualization tool one would expect Greeson to mention, he did not specifically name it alongside the other contextualization approaches that have helped bring about the recent change.

### **How Successful is the Camel Method?**

The question then arises: how successful is the Camel Method? How much of the recent success can be attributed to its implementation? How many documented conversions have been reported from missionaries using this approach? In a recent podcast Greeson stated that he does not have such documentation.<sup>22</sup> But he is aware of fifteen church planting

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<sup>20</sup> (Greeson, Church Planting Movements Among Muslim Peoples 2011, 1)

<sup>21</sup> Greeson stated that Muslims' consciences have been rattled by seeing themselves as members of a terrorist religion.

<sup>22</sup> (Biblical Missiology 2010)

movements which successfully use Qur'anic bridging, of which the Camel Method is one such method.

Rankin, however, seems less hesitant to point out Camel's success. In reference to the missionary who had been serving in the Middle East for twenty years who had not won one single Muslim to Christ during that entire time, Rankin followed that upon learning the Camel Method, "he soon led six Muslims to the Lord in the local Mosque." He added, "There are all kinds of thrilling stories sweeping the Muslim world from Pakistan, all across the Middle East, to Northern Africa." Rankin stated that in South Asia missionaries have had tremendous success using the principles which eventually made their way into the Camel Method: "There is one group in South Asia that reported over 100,000 Muslim background believers being baptized and becoming Christians."<sup>23</sup>

### **Development of the Camel Method**

Kevin Greeson, who earned his Masters of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been a practicing missionary with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board (IMB) since 1993, where he has served as a missionary to Muslims in South Asia. Greeson stated that he and the other IMB missionaries did not invent the methodology per se, but "he is the one who captured this method of witnessing from Muslim-background believers", which gave expression to the method found in the book. His methodology, he claimed, was born from years of observation in the field of what works and what does not.<sup>24</sup>

In 2007, he published this methodology in a book entitled, *The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ!*<sup>25</sup>. Soon thereafter, Southern Baptist IMB President Jerry Ranking, the missions group under which Greeson served, officially adopted the method for his

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<sup>23</sup> (Harris 2007)

<sup>24</sup> (Harris 2007)

<sup>25</sup> (Greeson, *The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ!* 2010)

organization, making it the primary approach for witnessing to Muslims, and many missionaries began reporting great success using the methodology.

### **Contextualization Defined**

As Greeson stated, the Camel Method is a form of Qur'anic bridging, which itself is a type of "contextualization". What is contextualization? And is it biblical? And if so, at what point does contextualization become unsafe or unbiblical? In determining whether the Camel Method is valid, these questions must be addressed.

Contextualization begins with the recognition that each person is born into a culture that shapes his or her worldview. Inevitably, the values and traditions of that culture will shape the forms, practices and traditions of those Christians within that context. In missionary evangelism, Christians in one context attempt to carry the gospel with its added cultural values into another people group of differing values. If a people reject the gospel, they might not be rejecting the message of the gospel so much as the foreign cultural norms that have been added to it.

Contextualization, therefore, is "the process of adapting the unchanging gospel message to a myriad of cultural contexts in the world today."<sup>26</sup> It is the recognition that these values and cultural norms can create barriers which prevent people within those cultures from readily receiving the gospel. Without sacrificing the gospel message, it seeks to remove those barriers, while still communicating the pure and unchanging truth of the gospel.

### **Biblical Examples of Contextualization**

But is contextualization biblical? Some might be surprised that there are quite a few examples of contextualization in the Bible. The following biblical examples should be considered:

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<sup>26</sup> (Bailey 2008)

Jesus preached to Samaritans and Gentiles without requiring them to conform to Jewish practices. Peter's dramatic vision of Acts 10 showed him that he needed to modify his approach to the Gentile culture; this he did, and a Roman centurion came to faith in Christ as a result. Paul's statement that he would be "all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22) indicates his willingness to contextualize the truth for his hearers, whoever they may be. And, finally, in Revelation we see that the Lord Jesus has redeemed people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9; 14:6). The gospel is truly cross-cultural and must be presented in a way that each culture can apprehend.<sup>27</sup>

Some have even argued that the Apostle John borrowed the concept of the "Logos" in John 1:1 from Greek philosophy. The argument is that John's Gentile audience was saturated with Greek philosophy, was already aware of the concept of the "Logos", and that by borrowing the concept and applying it to Christ, his audience would have immediately understood that Jesus was God, the originator of all things in the universe.<sup>28</sup> If true, this would be a strong example of contextualization.<sup>29</sup>

But perhaps the clearest and most cited example of contextualization comes from Acts 17, where Paul addressed the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers on Mars Hill. When one makes a simple comparison between the gospel message given at Mars Hill and those messages given to other audiences (especially Jewish), it is clear that Paul most certainly adapted the gospel message to fit his audience. While some argue that this Athens message was a failed attempt by Paul which he would later recognize as a mistake in 1 Corinthians 2:2,<sup>30</sup> it is important to note that some indeed did get saved through the message (Acts 17:34).

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<sup>27</sup> (Got Questions Ministries n.d.)

<sup>28</sup> (Geisler 1999, 430)

<sup>29</sup> It would also be pertinent in the discussion of whether it is acceptable to use the title of "Allah" for the Biblical concept of God.

<sup>30</sup> (Winters 2004)

### **When Does Contextualization Become Unbiblical?**

But is there a point where contextualization goes too far? Is it possible for a method to be theologically sound in doctrine, yet be so contextualized that it creates confusion?

Consider the following:

Some evangelical missionaries today design churches that look like mosques—churches where worshippers remove their shoes when entering and where the Bible is displayed on a type of stand typically used for the Qur'an. New believers in such churches may keep their Islamic (*halal*) diet, wear traditional Islamic dress, and fast during Ramadan. Some missionaries even encourage new believers to continue to call themselves Muslims and to perform traditional Islamic prayers.<sup>31</sup>

Dr. Fred Smith, Associate Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, answered the question above when he stated:

The ideal of contextualization is to present the gospel in terms which the hearers will understand and so be able to make an informed decision about trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The challenge of contextualization is to find a way to do this without changing the basic message.<sup>32</sup>

A good axiom can be derived from his statement: a contextualization method immediately becomes unbiblical when it compromises any of the essential doctrines of historical Christian faith. There are some who contend that the Camel Method does indeed directly compromise the message of the Gospel, or it either indirectly does so by mixing religions until neither is recognizable. The Camel Method will now be analyzed to see if any of these contentions are true.

### **The Camel Method Defined**

What exactly is the Camel Method? It is not as easy to define as one would initially imagine. A cursory Internet search on the subject will reveal that there is much confusion over what the actual Camel Methodology is. This is partly due to the aforementioned controversy,

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<sup>31</sup> (Reynolds 2011, 16)

<sup>32</sup> (Smith 2009)

numerous blog posts, and the circulation of ancillary tracts which seem to go beyond the basic Camel approach. In an attempt to demystify the confusion, my analysis comes directly from Greeson's book, *The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ!*,<sup>33</sup> unless otherwise noted.

### **The C.A.M.E.L. Acronym**

At the outset, one may wonder why it is called “Camel”? The choice of the word “Camel” is significant for two reasons. First, it is an acronym which stands for Chosen (Mary was chosen by God for a special purpose), Announced by angels, Miracles (Jesus' power is revealed in his miracles), and Eternal Life (Jesus is and knows the way to heaven).<sup>34</sup> All of these statements would be significant to a Muslim, and serve as a tool and general guideline for opening up dialog. Second, it is widely believed in Islam that there are ninety-nine revealed names for Allah, and the only creature who knows the one-hundredth name is the Camel. The idea is that Jesus (or “Isa” as he is known in Qur'anic culture) is that one-hundredth name for God which the Muslim does not know. The goal is to let “the camel” reveal Isa to the Muslim, the one-hundredth and currently unknown name for God.

### **An Attempt to Join God**

Greeson begins to reveal the heart of the Camel Method in chapter 4 of his book. The method is founded on the belief that God is already at work in the lives of Muslims around the Christian worker, drawing them to Himself. The Christian worker is instructed to observe where the Father is at work around him. It is explained that this is the way Jesus ministered:

Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working ... Truly, I say to you the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves

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<sup>33</sup> (Greeson, *The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ!* 2010)

<sup>34</sup> (Greeson, *The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ!* 2010, 106)

the Son and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these that you may marvel. (John 5:17-20)

From this passage it is concluded that Jesus showed us that (1) the Father is still at work in the world, (2) we should join the Father wherever He is working, (3) apart from the Father we can do nothing, (4) we should be attentive with our spiritual eyes and ears to discover where the Father is working, (5) as soon as we see where the Father is at work, we should stop what we are doing and join Him, and (6) the Father shows us where He is working because He loves us and wants to work through us in amazing ways.<sup>35</sup>

Examples are given from Jesus' life. First mentioned is Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-9. Jesus was walking down a busy street when he saw a short tax collector who climbed into a tree. It was very unusual for people to climb trees just to get a glimpse of Jesus. So when Jesus saw Zacchaeus, it was a good indication that the Father was at work within him. Therefore, Jesus knew he should concentrate his efforts on him by spending time with him over lunch. The same type of example is given from the story of blind Bartimaeus and the Samaritan woman in John 4.

The worker is encouraged to seek the voice of the Lord through prayer, the Bible, and through obedience to develop "spiritual ears" through which he can hear where God is at work in the lives of Muslims around him. Additionally, there are practical things the worker can look for or listen for in conversation to gauge whether God might be drawing a Muslim to Jesus. For example, it's a good indication that God is at work within somebody if they say anything like the following:

"I am ashamed of the way we Muslims have been acting." (See John 16:8-11)

"I had a dream in which a prophet spoke to me." (See Acts 10:30-33)

"I want to know what the truth is." (See John 16:13, 17:17)

"I want to understand what the Bible is saying." (Matthew 13:10-11)

"I think that Allah is speaking to me." (See John 10:26-27)

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<sup>35</sup> p 59. This bears striking similarity to the book *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby.

“I want to know more about Isa.” (See John 6:44)

“What will happen to me when I die?” (See Hebrews 2:15)<sup>36</sup>

If the Christian worker senses this type of activity in the life of their Muslim friend, they are to concentrate their efforts on that person. This person may be “the man of peace” that God has brought to the worker for the purpose of salvation.

### **The Man of Peace**

The “man of peace” (also called “woman of peace” or “person of peace”) is receptive to the Gospel.<sup>37</sup> This concept is based on Luke 10:1-20 in which Jesus sent out the seventy-two disciples in pairs of two to carry the gospel into the surrounding cities. When a pair of disciples found “a son of peace”, they were instructed to remain in that person’s house. The passage states: “But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house.” (Luke 10:5-7)

### **The Camel Strategy**

Once the person of peace has been identified, here is the strategy the worker is to follow: (1) pray, (2) have a humble heart, (3) think about the best place to have a conversation, (4) expect “good will”<sup>38</sup>, (5) do not be deceptive (those from non-Muslim backgrounds are encouraged to identify themselves as Christians who love Muslims), (6) engage the Muslim from their own religious book, the Qur’an, (7) use leading questions, (8) bridge to the Bible, (9) lift up Jesus, (10) turn on the “spiritual radar” and be led by God through the process.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> p. 63.

<sup>37</sup> All of chapter 5 is dedicated to the Person of Peace topic.

<sup>38</sup> Surah 5:82-23 suggests that there should be good relations between Muslims and Christians.

<sup>39</sup> pp. 100-106.

### **Why Start with the Qur'an?**

Greeson is careful to explain why the worker is to start from the Qur'an, not the Bible. The reason that Muslim have been taught from childhood that the Qur'an is the only true Word of God, and to reject any other book that makes a similar claim. As a result, if any attempt is made to start with the Jewish or Christian Bible, the Muslim will immediately become defensive. The Qur'an is meant to be used as a bridge; the goal is not to keep the Muslim in the Qur'an, but to eventually get them into the New Testament. Greeson states plainly, "Remember, there is not enough light in the Qur'an to bring Muslims to salvation, but there are enough flickers of truth to draw out God's person of peace from among them. As soon as possible, you want to bridge them out of the Qur'an and into the Bible where they can see the truth for themselves."<sup>40</sup>

### **The Central Surah**

The passage from the Qur'an that the Christian is to share is Surah 3:42-55. Again, the claim is that there is enough truth contained in this Surah to reveal Jesus to the Muslim, or at least to get the Muslim thinking about Jesus. The Christian worker should do their best to avoid jumping to other passages. This not only helps with training (the worker only needs to concentrate on one Surah), but it also helps the worker avoid other scriptures which stand in opposition to the Christian message.

The goal of reading Surah 3:42-55 is to raise Jesus up in the mind of the "man of peace". This is done by showing that Jesus (Isa) is holy, that he has power even over death, and that he knows the way to heaven. Here is an outline which has been adapted from Greeson's book which summarizes it well:<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> pp. 104-105.

<sup>41</sup> (Snowden 2005, 12)

### Camel Method Outline

(1) Opening Statement: “I have read some amazing things in the Qur’an. Would you read to me Sura Al ‘Imraan 3:42-55 so that I could ask you some questions about it?”

(2) Three Steps to raising ‘Isa up in the mind of a Muslim

- a. ‘Isa is holy. – Sura 3:42-47
- He is the word of Allah. – 45
  - He is “Ruhullah” (Spirit of God). – 21:91
  - He is Al Masiih (The Messiah). – 45
  - He is righteous. – 46
  - He is virgin born. – 47

*Do you know of any other prophet as holy as ‘Isa?*

- b. ‘Isa has power over death. – 3:48-54
- He gave sight to the blind. – 49
  - He healed lepers. – 49
  - He raised the dead to life again. – 49
  - Your duty to Allah is to obey ‘Isa. – 50
  - To know what ‘Isa told us to do you must read the Injiil. – 48

*Do you know of any other prophet as powerful as ‘Isa?*

- c. ‘Isa knows the way to heaven and can show us the way. – 3:55
- Those who believe in ‘Isa are set above; those who disbelieve.
  - ‘Isa is in paradise and knows the way.

(3) Final Question: I want to go to paradise when I die. You want to go to paradise when you die. ‘Isa is in paradise and knows the way to paradise. Out of all the prophets, which one is best able to help us get to paradise?

### Explaining Surah 3:42-55<sup>42</sup>

Surah 3:42 begins with the angels coming to Mary and saying, “Truly, Allah has chosen you and made you pure and has preferred you above all the women of creation”. This is significant because the Qur’an states that Mary was chosen (the first letter in the acronym “Camel”) and angels spoke to her (the second letter).

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<sup>42</sup> Some material presented here is drawn from both Greeson’s book and Snowden’s adaptation.

The passage continues with the angels saying, “O Maryam! Truly, Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him, whose name will be Masih, Isa (Messiah, Jesus), the son of Maryam, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter, and will be one of those who are near to Allah” (3:45). Notice that the passage says that Jesus would not only be held in honor on earth and in heaven, but that he would be one of the few who are near to Allah. He is also identified as “the Word of God” and the Messiah.

Continuing, Jesus is also said to be righteous and born of a virgin: “He will speak unto mankind in the cradle and in his manhood and Isa is righteous. She said, ‘O My Lord, how can I have a child when no man has touched me?’ He said, ‘So (it will be) for Allah creates what He will. If He decrees a thing, He says unto it only: Be! And it is’ (Surah 3:46-57).

At this point, the Muslim is challenged to consider what these things mean. What does it mean that Isa is a “Word from Allah”? Or what does it mean that he is the Masih (Messiah or promised one)? It says that he is righteous—did he ever sin? This idea of original sin will likely seem foreign to a Muslim. Muslims commonly believe that while the prophets made mistakes, they did not sin.

Instead of arguing this point, the Christian worker is encouraged to simply point out how righteous Jesus was. Jesus never killed anyone, did not have a love for money, never married, spoke out against corruption amongst the religious leaders, and taught people to love their enemies. In addition, he prayed every day, and he fasted for forty days and nights (in fact, he did not even eat after sunset which is permissible during Ramadan). These are practices that Muslims deeply value. By pointing these things out, the Christian worker is strategically demonstrating how the righteousness of Jesus exceeds the righteousness of Mohammed.

The Muslim is also challenged to consider the fact that he was born of a virgin. He is asked, “Why was Isa the only prophet (out of 124,000) to be born of a virgin?” This strategically designed question is to get the Muslim thinking that Jesus has a unique place among the prophets. For, “Do you know any other prophet that came into existence without an earthly father?”

Having built an argument from Surah 3 that Jesus is holy and unique, the Christian worker then attempts to prove that Jesus has power over death. The Surah progresses with: “And He (*Allah*) will teach him (*Isa*) the Scripture, and the wisdom, and the Torah (*Taurat*) and the gospel (*Injil*)” (Surah 3:48). In other words, Jesus is taught by God what the Scriptures mean, specifically from the Jewish Torah and the Christian gospel accounts, validating the Old and New Testaments.

Jesus not only has wisdom, but he has power to heal the blind and lepers, and even raise the dead. The Surah continues:

And will make him a messenger unto the children of Israel saying: Lo! I come to you with a sign from the Lord. Lo! I design for you out of clay the likeness of a bird and breathe into it, and it is a bird, by Allah’s will; I heal him who is born blind and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah’s will. And I announce unto you what you eat and what you store up in your houses. Surely herein truly is a sign for you, if you are to be believers (3:49).

After stating that Jesus’ coming confirms prophecies from the Torah, the Muslim is challenged from the Qur’an itself to “keep their duty” to Allah by obeying him: “And I come confirming that which was before me of Torah and to make lawful some of that which was forbidden to you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to Allah and obey me” (3:50). Interestingly, since the disciples surrendered to this truth, they are identified as Muslims<sup>43</sup>. “But when *Isa* came to know of their disbelief, he said, “Who will be my helpers in the cause of Allah? The disciples said: We will be Allah’s helpers. We believe Allah and bear you witness that we have surrendered (lit. we are *muslims*)” (3:52). Thus, according to the Qur’an, the disciples who believed in and followed Jesus were the first true “submitted ones” or Muslims. The Muslim is further challenged with the question, “Do you know any other prophet who is as powerful as *Isa*?”

The last point in the outline is to show that Jesus knows the way to heaven. The final verse in the passage is 3:55:

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<sup>43</sup> In Arabic, the word *muslim* literally means “surrendered one”

And remember when Allah said: O Isa (Jesus)! I am gathering you and causing you to ascend to Me and am cleansing you of those who disbelieve and am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve till the Day of Resurrection. Then you will return to Me and I shall judge between you in that in which you used to differ.” In that God has caused Jesus “to ascend to Me”, Jesus is raised, ascended and is now in the presence of God. And those who follow Jesus based on this passage will be set “above those who disbelieve” on the Day of Resurrection.

After hearing that Jesus is in heaven presently, and that he knows the way to heaven, the Muslim is asked, “Of all the prophets, which one is best able to help us get to heaven?”

This ends the study through Surah 3. The Christian worker is encouraged to evaluate whether the Muslim is positively receiving the message before continuing. If not, the Christian worker may consider allowing some time for the Lord to work in the heart of the Muslim before continuing any further. However, at this point in a dialog, Greeson is quick to point out:

If a Muslim listens to you through the entire Camel presentation, keep in mind that he has still not heard the Gospel. Your Camel presentation allowed him to see Isa in a way he has never seen Him before and gain an eye-opening glimpse into who He really is. The presentation lifted Jesus out of prophet status and raised Him nearer to Savior status. A foundation for hearing the plan of salvation is now in place.<sup>44</sup>

If the Muslim is showing positive reception to the message, the worker is encouraged to continue with the *Korbani* Plan of Salvation.

### **The *Korbani* Plan of Salvation**

The word *korban* means “sacrifice” in both Hebrew and Aramaic. Both Jews and Muslims believe that the *korbani* sacrifice is the way for people to draw near to God. In fact, every year, Muslims observe the *Korbani-Eid* as a holy day. The day is observed in the following way.<sup>45</sup> (1) The father or head of household buys a sheep, goat or cow without defects. (2) The animal is brought home and fed well. (3) On the morning of the *Korbani-Eid*, family members dress up, gather around the animal, place their hands on the animal. Some Muslims untie the animal, signifying the willingness of the animal to be a sacrifice. (4) Those present

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<sup>44</sup> pp. 113

<sup>45</sup> p. 117

place their hands on the animal. The father reads from a piece of paper the names of family members who are unable to be present. (5) The animal's throat is slit and the animal dies. The *korban* is intended to atone for those who place their hands on the animal, as well as those family members whose names are written on a piece of paper. (6) The animal is eaten.

The analogy between the *korbani* sacrifice and Jesus are clear. The worker can transition from Surah 3 to the *Korbani* Plan by showing how from verses 54-55 how ultimately it was Allah's plan for Isa to die as the *korbani*.<sup>46</sup>

At this point, the gospel presentation follows very much a traditional gospel presentation, with the Christian explaining the Fall of man in the Garden, and how it was God who killed the first animal (*korban*) to atone for sins, and thus the tradition had begun. It is explained that since God is completely holy, nothing unholy can come into His presence. In order for man's relationship to be restored, all of our sins must be removed. The *korbani* system is revealed by God to be a picture to teach of the penalty from our sins. However, when our sins are transferred to a pure sacrifice, we can be forgiven. Jesus is then revealed to be that pure sacrifice chosen by God because He is the only one without sin. The final plea is that the Muslim would recognize there is nothing they can do to cleanse themselves from their sin, and receive God's *korbani* sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If the convert is receptive, the Christian worker is encouraged to lead the former Muslim in a sinner's prayer that sounds nearly identical to a traditional sinner's prayer within Western cultures. From here, the new convert is encouraged to start reading the Bible and seek fellowship with other believers in a church community context.

Now that a careful description has been made of the Camel Method, evaluation will be made to determine whether it is a valid biblical approach to evangelism.

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<sup>46</sup> Cross reference pp. 118-130

### Objections to the Camel Method

Perhaps the most prominent critic of the Camel Method to date has been Dr. Ergun Caner.<sup>47</sup> Caner believes that the Camel Method is an approach based on deception. On an SBC Today podcast, he said, “You can’t start an evangelistic enterprise based on deception... I just can’t imagine that type of lying, and that’s exactly what I call it.”<sup>48</sup> Caner also has an issue with missionaries’ use of “Allah” to refer to “God”. To suggest that the God of the Bible and Allah of the Qur’an have something in common, according to Caner, is “absolute, fundamental deception.”<sup>49</sup>

Dr. Bart Barber, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Farmersville, Texas, and a trustee of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, stated that the book never clarifies that Mohammed is not a prophet, it never clarifies that “Allah” of the Qur’an is not the same as the God of the Bible, nor does it instruct the convert that the Qur’an is not inspired.<sup>50</sup> Barber further added:

Key details of the nature of God, Jesus, God's Revelation, and the gospel are treated by *The Camel* as ‘insider information.’ The book discusses the status of Mohammed and the Qur'an, as well as the obstacles to Christian faith that a Muslim faces. But it carefully instructs evangelists to Muslims not to let Muslims in on that conversation. And throughout *The Camel*, including the entirety of the *Korbani* plan of salvation, that deceptive situation never changes.

Barber’s concern echoes those made by Ibrahim Hoxha over another evangelism approach called the Common Ground Movement<sup>51</sup>. Hoxha, a former Muslim who came to faith in Christ, stated the following about Common Ground:

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<sup>47</sup> Dr. Ergun Caner currently serves as an Adjunct Professor of Global Apologetics at Veritas Evangelical Seminary where this paper is being submitted.

<sup>48</sup> (Vu 2010)

<sup>49</sup> (Openheimer 2010)

<sup>50</sup> (Barber 2008)

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix 2 for a comparison of other contextualization approaches.

Bringing Muslims to the point of accepting Jesus as being crucified and risen without leaving and forsaking Islam is definitely not a biblical thing. Mohammed is a prophet, but definitely a false one. There should not be confusion with that. While we should be committed to loving Muslims, we should expose the false teachings of Islam. Mohammed openly rejected Jesus' divinity and distorted biblical truth, and as such he cannot carry the true message. If there are confusions regarding these truths than one did not come to understand God's only way of salvation as found in the Bible. The confusion will inevitably come into lives of these believers and at some point they will no longer know who their true Master is!<sup>52</sup>

Others are quick to throw Camel into the same category as movements like Common Ground because of tract which can be found on the Camel Method website called the Ruhullah Tract.<sup>53</sup> George Houssney, President of Horizons International and contributor to BiblicalMissiology.com stated plainly:

Contextualization, the Camel Method, Common Ground among others basically share the same view of Islam, Muhammad and the Quran. Some of them like the Camel Method deny that they are insiders. In a tract named "Ruhullah" they introduce the designation: "Completed or Pakka Muslim." If this is not Insider, what is? ... The insider movement is unbiblical.<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Malcolm B. Yarnell of the Center for Theological Research agrees that with the Camel Method "New Christians are encouraged to hide their faith, continue attending mosque or temple, and otherwise act like Muslims or Hindus."<sup>55</sup>

### **Greeson's Response to the Objections**

Greeson has attempted to address all of these concerns. He was recently asked to respond to these concerns in a Biblical Missiology podcast.<sup>56</sup> Here is a summary of some of his responses.

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<sup>52</sup> (Hoxha 2010)

<sup>53</sup> [http://www.camelmethod.com/downloads/Ruhullah\\_English\\_eBook.pdf](http://www.camelmethod.com/downloads/Ruhullah_English_eBook.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> (G. Houssney 2010)

<sup>55</sup> (Yarnell 2005)

<sup>56</sup> (Biblical Missiology 2010)

*Does Camel Blend Allah with God of the Bible?*

He was asked to clarify the Camel Method's view of God, and whether his method promotes a view to Muslims that the God of the Qur'an and the Bible are the same. Greeson answered, "As Christians, we believe that there is only one God, so to speak of two different Gods makes no sense. But no Christian would ever accept that the Muslim, Qur'anic doctrine of God is true and accurate." He cited the fact that translators have been using the title of "Allah" for God in many Arabic translations of the Bible, and the use of "Allah" as a title for God has also been used in the Arabic Jesus Film. He said that the use of "Allah" among Arab Christians to describe God is something that he does not have control over, but that when they use "Allah", these Arabic Christians are referring to the God of the Bible. Quoting from his book, he said:

The question is not what you call God, but what do you mean by that name? If our doctrines and understandings of God come from the Qur'an then we will certainly not end up with a Christian view of God. If, on the other hand, our authoritative source about God is the Bible, then our doctrine of God will remain true regardless of which language we will use to call His name.<sup>57</sup>

Greeson continued by citing a document that has been distributed from his mission board to all missionary personnel:

The theological construct represented by the term 'Allah' in the Qur'anic system is deficient and unacceptable. However, the primary issue is not the term. The same name is used by devote Christians, and it represents a sound scriptural view of God. In fact, historically, the Christian use of Allah predates the rise of Islam. The missionary task is to teach who Allah is truly is in accord with Biblical revelation.<sup>58</sup>

*Does Camel Encourage Believers to Remain Muslim?*

Another concern has to do with the concept of becoming a *pakka* (true) Muslim. The accusation is that the Camel Method encourages converts to remain in the Islamic *ummah*

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<sup>57</sup> (Greeson, *The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ!* 2010, 167)

<sup>58</sup> (SBC Today 2007)

(community), practice Islamic rituals, even pray towards Mecca and continue reciting the *shahada*.<sup>59</sup>

He responded with, “Nowhere in the Camel Method, whether in the training or in the book, is there a mention of *pakka* Muslims or true Muslims.” The concept of becoming a *pakka* Muslim, Greeson stated, is a separate tool that Greeson developed in a tract entitled “The Ruallah Tract”. This tract explains that a *pakka* Muslim is a believer in Jesus Christ. He further added that he is not aware of any Muslim converts within any of the movements who refer to themselves as *pakka* Muslims.

Instead, they refer to themselves as *Isa he* (“one who follows Jesus”). And they no longer attend mosques, read the Qur’an, say the *shahadah*, continue with the ritual of washing, nor do they believe that Mohammed is a prophet of God any longer. He also added that he personally could not understand how a convert can continue to remain in the *umma* and grow in their faith.

#### *Does Camel Teach the Qur’an is Inspired by God?*

The argument is that using the Qur’an to reveal Jesus, the evangelist is using the Qur’an as an authority. Does the Camel Method in any way teach that Mohammed or the Qur’an was inspired by God?

To this, Greeson responded with an emphatic, “Absolutely not!” Reading from his book, he said: “While the Qur’an’s teaching about Allah may echo many of the truths about God that were first revealed in the Bible, we must never confuse the Qur’an with the Word of God.”<sup>60</sup>

Instead, he affirmed that the intent of the Camel Method is to use the talking points of Surah 3 as a springboard. The goal is to start with the Surah, but go into talking about Jesus

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<sup>59</sup> The *shahada* is Islamic creedal statement of “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God”.

<sup>60</sup> Greeson did not give the page number in the podcast.

from the Bible. He said that the approach is successful in that he does not find that converts continue reading their Qur'an once they are saved.

### **My Conclusion: Is It Helpful or Is It Heresy?**

Having examined a brief history of the controversy surrounding the Camel Method, and contextualization approaches in general, and having examined the methodology by going to the source, Greeson's actual book, I can emphatically say that my conclusion is that the Camel Method is not heresy, does not make any perceivable theological compromises, and therefore should be embraced as a valuable and effective witnessing approach to Muslims.

### **Why the Confusion?**

I am left wondering why there is so much confusion over this subject. I believe much of the confusion stems from three things: (1) having little access to what the Camel Method is online, (2) confusion from the Ruhullah tract, and (3) unfounded fears of a Chrislam conspiracy.

#### *Having little access to what the Camel Method is online*

In today's Internet culture, people do research on topics through Internet searches. However, with regard to the Camel Method, there is very little original material from the author to review online. I believe many are jumping to conclusions about what this rather new methodology teaches. Beyond a few PDFs, miscellaneous FAQ statements and introductory videos, there is very little information available through the author's website. It is currently not even possible to review pages of the book through any online bookstores. Indeed, the only way to understand what the method teaches is to purchase and read the actual book. My concern is that people simply are not purchasing and reading the book.

#### *Confusion from the Ruhullah Tract*

While one will not find any original material from Greeson on what the Camel Method is online, curiously, one can find a tract called the "Ruhullah Tract" on the author's website. Greeson already addressed this tract in the podcast summarized above, and stated that

this is a separate project not to be confused with the Camel Method. Indeed, in preparing a recent PowerPoint presentation on the same subject, before I had a copy of Greeson's book, I myself confused the Camel Method with this tract.

It is unclear why Greeson has developed this other approach in the tract, but what is clear is that it does appear to be a more contextualized approach. However, as Greeson stated, *that* is not the Camel Method. My conclusion in this paper applies to the Camel Method contained in Greeson's book. I would hope that others would make this distinction in their consideration of the tool.

#### *Unfounded fears of Chrislam conspiracy*

Lastly, I think it is important to address the fears mentioned in the opening of the paper of a growing Chrislam conspiracy. A quick internet search on "Rick Warren Chrislam" will reveal that this conspiracy is alive and well in the church today. Whether there be any basis for this conspiracy could be the subject of another interesting paper, but my first response is to consider that Warren is simply making use of contextualization as an attempt to build bridges into the Muslim community. At this point in time I do not personally see any need to be alarmed that evangelical leaders are secretly joining forces with interfaith leaders to advance Samsindeen Saka's Chrislam religion here in the United States. But I do believe that this fear is giving rise to knee-jerk reactions by those within the church, and is causing many to become skeptical of any contextualization approach, even those that are theologically sound, like the Camel Method.

#### **Final Thoughts**

To quote Dr. David Garrison, editor of the Camel Workshop: "Every great work of God provokes a predictable backlash from Satan, as his domain is threatened. The Camel Method has been no exception."<sup>61</sup> I share the desire of Dr. Phil Partial of the Southern Baptist

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<sup>61</sup> (Garrison n.d.)

IMB: “It would be my heartfelt desire that this controversy over Camel not be used by Satan to distract our missionaries from this new, exciting direction they have taken in Muslim outreach.”<sup>62</sup>

I certainly am excited to have a strategy I can use when witnessing to a Muslim, one that is theologically sound, and been proven to work.

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<sup>62</sup> (SBC Today 2010, comments)

### **Appendix 1 – Controversy Timeline**

- 1970 ~ “Chrislam” movement begins in Nigeria  
 Officially blends Christianity and Islam
- 2004 ~ Missionary Kevin Greeson develops Camel Method  
 Publishes *The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ!*  
 Camel Method is born
- Oct 13, 2007 ~ 138 religious leaders meet to discuss similarities  
 Produce document: “A Common Word Between Us and You”  
 John Piper blasts protestant leaders who support
- Jan 20, 2009 ~ Rick Warren prays in name of “Isa” during Obama’s Inauguration Prayer
- May 28, 2009 ~ PBS reports that “Chrislam” is taking hold in Nigeria
- Feb 3, 2010 ~ Ergun Caner says Camel Method is heresy  
 Caner (then president of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary) calls Southern Baptist  
 IMB President Jerry Rankin a liar for using it
- Mar 10, 2010 ~ New York Times publishes article  
 “A Dispute on Using the Koran as a Path to Jesus”
- June 2011 ~ Jack Van Impe speaks out against Rick Warren  
 Says supporting Chrislam, one world religion  
 TBN pulls repeat broadcast, Van Impe leaves TBN ending 25 year broadcast
- Feb 23, 2012 ~ Orange County Register publishes article “Rick Warren Builds Bridge to  
 Muslims”. States he seeks “to end 1,400 years of misunderstanding between Muslims  
 and Christians”. Article states that “Christians and Muslims worship the same God.”  
 Warren responds saying author misquoted and misrepresented him. Rumors continue  
 over Warren’s support of “King’s Way” document

## **Appendix 2 - Other Contextualization Methodologies**

### **The C1-C6 Spectrum<sup>63</sup>**

Around 1990, Christian missionaries began to rank Muslim regions based on their perceived resistance to the Gospel. The approach takes into consideration the degree of freedom Christians have within Muslim communities to assemble, identify themselves with, and publically practice Christianity, particularly from a Western Christian style of worship.

Those regions defined as C1 have the most freedom to reflect Western culture and can call themselves Christians and openly identify themselves with a local Christian church, while C6 regions are those areas under totalitarian regimes, where identifying oneself as a Christian would certainly be met with legal action, including capital punishment.

The general idea with the C1-C6 approach is that different methodologies must be employed when attempting to reach a C6 community, than when reaching a C1 community. Traditional churches characterized by Western language and culture may be built in more tolerable communities. But communities that traverse up the scale may have to contextualize the Gospel using insider language, becoming religiously and culturally neutral, adopting the forms of the culture, with Christians remaining anonymous, while continuing to attend religious services of their former religion.

### **Insider Movement**

The C1-C6 Spectrum later gave way to what was termed the “Insider Movement”.

This movement can be defined as:

...any movement to faith in Christ where (a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where (b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their

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<sup>63</sup> (Travis n.d.)

identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.<sup>64</sup>

It is important to note the words of Phil Parshall which attempt to disassociate the Camel Method from these movements:

There has been some confusion concerning whether Camel represents a C5 position: i.e., have Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) remain in the mosque, say the Islamic creed, delete “Son of God” from New Testament translations, and call themselves Muslims without qualifier. I was on the 2005 IMB survey team in Bangladesh and saw no evidence whatsoever of C5 in any of the IMB-related ministry. I personally interviewed 72 MBBs in Bengali and each one gave a clear profession of faith. On the scale developed by John Travis, the work is C4, which is what I have practiced and taught since 1975. I am sorry that some folk have felt my Evangelical Missions Quarterly articles were concerned about a Camel-type approach. Not true. My concern is C5, of which I saw and heard nothing in my Bangladesh visit and see no evidence of in Camel.<sup>65</sup>

### **Messianic Muslim Movement**

The “Insider Movement” has given rise to a movement targeting communities living in C5 regions called Messianic Muslim Movement.<sup>66</sup> This movement rejects or “modifies” unbiblical Islamic teachings, yet allows believers to continue to remain under the social fabric of Islam. They do not view or call themselves “Christians”, but they do meet together to study the Bible, pray for each other, and fellowship in Christ. It is required that Messianic Muslims strive to follow Christian orthodoxy, but within the context of Islam culture in a non-Western environment.

This appears to be what Kevin Greeson’s Ruhullah Tract is promoting. As has already been discussed in the paper, Greeson contends that this is an entirely different project and should not be confused with the Camel Method.

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<sup>64</sup> Rebecca Lewis, "Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 24:2 (Summer, 2007), pp. 75-76, [http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/2](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/2)

<sup>65</sup> (SBC Today 2010)

<sup>66</sup> (Travis, *Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa: A Closer Look at C5 Believers and Congregations* 2000)

### **Story Telling**

Another approach developed by Greg Livingstone of Frontiers is called “Story Telling”.<sup>67</sup> The Western mind tends to value propositional and logical arguments. However, other cultures are more receptive to storytelling and proverbs. The claim is that storytelling does not cause anger and is not illegal where preaching is. And, storytelling is quite popular in Muslim cultures, with many people traveling very far to hear a good story, and it is an ideal method for teaching religious truth (as evidenced by Jesus in the Gospels). Over the past 25 years, Greg claims that Frontiers has been successful in establishing 200 fellowships and churches with Muslim-background believers using a storytelling approach.

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<sup>67</sup> (Bell n.d.)

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