

# God Is Doing Something New

Author: John Travis

Date: 24.02.2010

Category: World Faiths

A Response to Joseph Cumming's 'Muslim Followers of Jesus'?

To facilitate a truly global conversation, we ask Christian leaders from around the world to respond to the Global Conversation's lead articles. These points of view do not necessarily represent Christianity Today magazine or the Lausanne Movement. They are designed to stimulate discussion from all points of the compass and from different segments of the Christian community. Please add your perspective by posting a comment so that we can learn and grow together in the unity of the Spirit.

For the past 2,000 years, the Kingdom of God has expanded as people groups representing the world's minor religious traditions (animistic and polytheistic) in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, among the major world religions, like Hinduism and Islam, relatively few have put their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. As the gospel is now being shared in an unprecedented way with those of the world's major religions, discussion concerning new approaches is bound to occur.

Cumming mentioned that since the Wesleyan and Great Awakening revivals, evangelicals have emphasized that personal faith in Jesus Christ is more important than any particular religious affiliation. This is really at the heart of the C5 discussion. Can Muslims who accept Jesus as Savior and Lord remain Muslim or must they join a new religion? Can born-again Muslims, similar to Messianic Jews, live as 'Jesus Muslims' remaining in their own community?

While the term C5 is relatively new, the basic concept is not. It was described in the late 1930s by missionaries working in the Middle East. Their reports mentioned that the term 'Christian' in many Muslim lands had only an ethnic, political, or cultural association that was largely negative, with no implications of a spiritual rebirth. In addition, they noted that numbers of Muslims had become followers of Jesus Christ, yet refused to separate from the Islamic community, so that they could continue to live with their people and share their new life in Christ. In Lebanon in 1969, Baptist missionary Virginia Cobb emphasized that we are saved by Christ, not 'religion.' Cobb stated, 'We are not trying to change anyone's religion. Religion consists of affiliation with a group ... [a] dogma, structure of authority. ... [T]he New Testament is quite clear that none of this saves. It is possible to change all of them without knowing God ... our message is a person we've experienced, not a doctrine, system, [or] religion. ...?' In the following decade, mission leader John Anderson (1976) and missiologists Charles Kraft (1974, 1979) and Harvey Conn (1979) all encouraged the idea of groups of Muslim followers of Christ who would be salt and light to their own people. Each of these writings has engendered both enthusiasm and criticism.

What these missionaries described is exemplified in the life of Ibrahim, the Qur'anic scholar mentioned by Cumming. Ibrahim closely examined verses commonly understood to deny Christ and the Bible, and found alternate interpretations in line with the Bible. He concluded that he could follow Jesus and remain inside the religious community of his birth. Soon members of his family and community came to share his faith in Jesus. While many Muslims would not take the bold step to reinterpret aspects of Islam for themselves, some do.

Most of those who do find such alternative interpretations become active in C5 fellowships and invite others to join them. My wife and I have had the privilege of spending extended time with dozens of Muslim followers of Jesus like Ibrahim, from a variety of places and walks of life. Some have secular or nominal backgrounds; others have deeply religious roots and wear distinctive clothing. Whatever the background or religious flavoring, they see themselves as Muslims who have chosen to follow Christ.

Cumming stated that the intent of C5 is not to avoid persecution. I concur. Tragically, a C5 believer known by one of my colleagues was recently martyred, poisoned by his own family because he would not stop talking about Jesus. Cumming also mentioned that C5 fellowships should eventually recognize the worldwide Body of Christ. I agree and see this occurring among the C5 believers I know.

The Spirit of God is doing something new among the world's 1.4 billion Muslims. I close with this challenge to us: Can we as Christian followers of Jesus recognize the true work of God in the lives of Muslim followers of Jesus? Can we honor and pray for them, befriending them if God opens the door? May God give us wisdom and grace in the years ahead to extend a warm welcome to true Jesus-followers, wherever they may be found.

John Travis is a pseudonym for a missionary who has lived and ministered, along with his family, in Muslim communities for more than 20 years.