I believe any worker or candidate focusing on ministry to Muslims would profit greatly from reading this book. Given its many improvements, I would even recommend that those who have read the first edition would profit from reading the second edition. Not everything is new, but enough is new that I would consider it well worth the time and cost. This book would be a great resource to recommend to interested supporters or church members who want to know more of 'the real story' about Islam. Because the various articles are of a manageable size for 'lay' readers, one could easily suggest a specific article or two, to answer well the kinds of questions that many western Christians have about Islam. In the face of current propaganda about Islam (both pro and con) from a variety of sources, I'm delighted to have *EWI*'s second edition as a useful and balanced source of perspective for anyone willing to take a look.

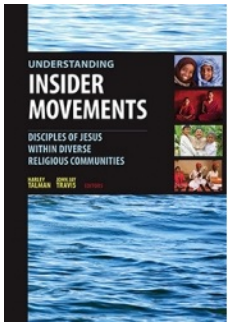
Reviewed by L.D. Waterman

Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities

Edited by Harley Talman and John Jay Travis

William Carey Library, 2015. 719 pages. ASIN: B01DEB8XN2.

One Side of a Very Important Discussion



In *Understanding Insider Movements (UIM),* editors Harley Talman and John Jay Travis have published a magnum opus that pulls together a great number of previously published articles supporting and explaining what proponents mean when they talk or write about Insider Movements (IMs). The tome also includes discussion of the not-identical but closely-related concept of 'C5' communities of Jesus-followers.

Definition of terms

In the opening chapter ('Insider Movements: Coming to Terms with Terms'), John Jay Travis explains that

> Although the term 'insider' can be used in a variety of ways, here we mean 'a person from a non-Christian background who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour but retained the socio-religious identity of his or her birth'. This means that in following Jesus, insiders have not left the religious community in which they were raised, nor have they joined a denomination or branch of Christianity. (8)

One page later, Travis offers this working definition of Insider Movements:

> *Multiplying networks of Jesus followers in insider-led fellowships where the Bible is obeyed as the word of God, spiritual transformation occurs, and insiders remain part of the families and socio-religious communities of their birth, bearing witness to Jesus, their risen Lord and Saviour'.*

In his opening pages (7-8), Travis also informs readers of the important fact that

> 'The way the terms 'Christian' and 'Christianity' are generally used in this book differs from the narrower meaning that evangelicals typically give them (i.e., denoting true saving faith in Jesus; being 'born again'). Rather, most of the authors…use the terms 'Christian' or 'Christianity' to designate socio-religious categories, as do many cultures of the world. Thus those terms are applied to both committed and nominal 'Christians'.

I suspect this (rarely clarified) definition of these terms has significantly contributed to misunderstanding in discussions of Insider Movements (IM) over the years.

Proponents of IMs tend to assume a sociological or 'socio-religious' meaning for the word 'Christian' (not necessarily conveying any spiritual significance), whereas many evangelicals assume a biblical meaning for the word (such as that found in English Bibles in Acts 11:26 and 1 Peter 4:16), and they assume that other evangelicals are assuming the same meaning. It appears to me that these differing assumptions and definitions of the word 'Christian' constitute a hidden foundational miscommunication in many disputes about IM. Thus I greatly appreciate Travis' clarification of this point at the outset.

A few chapters later, in 'The Key to Insider Movements: The "Devoteds" of Acts' (226), Kevin Higgins provides another working definition of Insider Movements, quoting Rebecca Lewis:

> An Insider Movement is 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 identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.

Higgins affirms this definition by adding, 'Such a definition is intended to make clear that followers of Jesus can continue to embrace at least some of their people's religious life, history and practice without compromising the gospel or falling into syncretism'. He also notes that what distinguishes IMs from 'descriptions of people movements' offered by thinkers such as Donald McGavran and Alan Tippett (and accepted by a much larger number of evangelicals) is the element of 'religion'. An insider movement is characterized by ongoing embrace of at least some elements of prior 'religious life, history and practice' and 'identity'.

Less than a page later (227), Higgins seems to blur the clarity of this definition and claim a much broader meaning for 'insider movement' stating, 'Every movement to Jesus is in some way an insider movement. Every movement to Jesus is inside of some culture and some aspects of a culture'. But despite this momentary shift in definition of 'insider', most of this article and the vast majority of *UIM* affirms and assumes the Lewis/Higgins/Travis definition of Insider Movements as maintaining distinctly *religious* elements from the pre-Christian lives of those involved.

Overview of *Understanding Insider Movements*

After more than two decades of lively discussion about IM and C5, dozens of previously published articles have now been collected in one place, with some new articles added, some fresh editing of previous articles, and the addition of an introduction and study questions. The 64 articles are grouped into seven parts:

Part 1: Setting the Stage: This section provides definition, historical background, conceptual perspective, answers to common questions and objections, and critical reflection on assessment criteria.

Part 2: Examples, Testimonies, and Analysis

Part 3: Biblical and Theological Perspectives: This section aims to answer the question 'Are insider movements biblical?' Much good and helpful material is found in the section, but I will note below a few concerns.

Part 4: Contextualization, Religion, and Syncretism: This section 'raises questions concerning the relationship between the gospel as the biblical message and Christianity as both a religion and a cultural movement', then 'expounds upon the theme of religion and shows the relevance it has to our attitude toward and understanding of insider movements'. In 'Reflections on Religion', Talman notes that:

> Assumptions about the meaning and nature of 'religion' are a major contributor or confusion about insider movements. However, most people are oblivious to this fact, because we all 'know' what religion is. Yet specialists in the field of religious studies are at the point of despair in attempting to achieve a common understanding of what a religion is. (341)

This appears to convey to readers the important information that if you feel you have clarity about the meaning of religion you won't likely grasp the IM paradigm, whereas if you join the experts in being agnostic about 'whether religion exists and whether it can be adequately defined' you will find it easier to grasp IMs.

Part 5: Approaches in Witness

Part 6: Concerns and Misunderstandings

Part 7: Identity

One-sided presentation

Readers can be thankful to have in one location most (or all?) of the best material currently available in defence of IM. This makes the book very useful as a reference work for anyone wanting to understand IM *from the perspective of its Western proponents*. However, from my vantage point, the book's greatest strength also constitutes in some ways a significant weakness. It presents only one side of long-standing and substantial discussion that has included numerous followers of Jesus from a Muslim background and has raised some important concerns.

Not that I wish the book were longer, but the relative absence of Muslim-background voices seems noteworthy. And the one-sided framing of some articles (notably 'Myths and Misunderstandings about Insider Movements') has left some readers wondering 'What was the *other* side of the conversation'? Such concerns appear strongly, for example, in the critical review of *UIM* published by Muslim-background leader Fred Farrokh.[4] Some other readers, who have been part of ongoing discussion about these issues, feel disappointed that after years of substantial interaction such as that in the Bridging the Divide Network (www.btdnetwork.org), *UIM* has returned to the pre-2011 approach of one-sided advocacy in printed form, now on a grander scale than ever before.

By presenting only one side of an important discussion, *UIM* implicitly invites discerning readers to fill in for themselves the other side of the discussion. From what I've read in other reviews so far, some of those fill-ins are not very accurate or helpful. Yet perhaps *UIM's* editors consider this one-sided approach a fitting response to book-length attacks on IM from a few years ago, such as *Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel* (eds. Lingel, Morton & Nikides, 2012) and *Insider Movements: Biblically Incredible or Incredibly Brilliant? (*Morton, 2012). In any case, after have had five years of substantial personal dialogue with the editors and many of *UIM*'s authors, *UIM* felt to me like a polarizing step backward from recent years of fruitful missiological discussion.

At a few points, however, *UIM* does acknowledge discussion that has taken place and present the fruit of some of that interaction. For example, Michael

[4] 'In Search of Sahih (Authentic) Insider Movements, A Review of *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus Within Diverse Religious Communities'*, John Travis and Harley Talman, editors. www.biblicalmissiology/reviews/book/Book Review: "Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus Within Diverse Religious Communities", October 2, 2015.

Roberts' 'Where We Agree… and Don't?' (pp. 545-548) offers a helpful summary of areas where IM proponents and opponents generally agree and disagree. The page listing areas of agreement provides good encouragement and diminishing of stereotypes and straw men in the discussion. And the two pages of disagreements (complete with pro-IM defence of nearly every point) provide a good (albeit incomplete) summary of issues of contention over the years.

Those who have kept current on discussion of these issues in recent years may feel that *UIM* mostly says what has already been said, but in a bigger way, with better nuance and care. Many past claims that IM opponents have highlighted and opposed do not appear in *UIM*. Clearly IM's proponents have paid attention to their critics, yet the essential IM message comes through very clearly, better polished than ever before.

A few especially noteworthy articles

Thankfully, not all the articles are reprints. Some, such as Richard Jameson's 'God's Creativity in Drawing Muslims to Jesus' and David Taylor's 'Contextualization, Syncretism, and the Demonic in Indigenous Movements' add new and useful perspective on the discussion. I also appreciated that not all the articles simply advocate for IM. Most notably, Len Bartlotti's 'Seeing Inside Insider Missiology: Exploring Our Theological Lenses and Presuppositions' offers exceedingly helpful perspectives for balanced consideration of these issues without the tone of advocacy found in most articles.

Among the most helpful articles for me personally was Ben Naja's 'Jesus Movement: A Case Study from Eastern Africa'. The contribution of real data illustrating a group having biblical beliefs and practices, paired with an ongoing sense of Muslim identity, should give pause to those who assume that Muslim identity always requires consistent Islamic beliefs and/or practices, or a syncretistic mix. This kind of clear data from a real case provides an essential part of the picture, which until very recently has been missing.

IM as a generalised construct?

One of my concerns about *UIM* lies with the presentation of IM as a generalised construct. It seems that the issues and challenges, and thus the viability of IMs, must differ radically from one religious group to another, depending on the socio-religious system they attempt to remain 'inside'. The two most notable types of IMs cited in *UIM* are among Muslims and among Hindus. Perhaps because of my own focus on Muslims, I found the inclusion of perspectives from the Hindu world much less helpful, if not actually somewhat misleading. Hinduism constitutes a very different entity than Islam, with unique sects and very diverse beliefs and practices being part of the norm, rather than a threat to be resisted, as in Islam.

Because the dynamics of the two religions are so very different, some of the most central issues related to IMs within them also seem quite different. One may commonly find a Hindu or group of Hindus who worship a statue or a goddess or a monkey. So it's not particularly outrageous to have a group of Hindus who worship Jesus (as do the *Yesu Bhakta*). But to my knowledge, no one who claims to be a Muslim or group of Muslims worships a statue or a goddess or a monkey. So it becomes significantly more problematic to have an identity as Muslims who worship Jesus. Islam around the world presents much tighter parameters than Hinduism for 'permissible' beliefs and practices. So although the *Yesu Bhakta* phenomenon presents an interesting point of comparison to Muslim IMs, I see the former as much less problematic than the latter. Thus the mixture and defence of the two as one amalgamated concept of 'IM' seems to me to surreptitiously borrow some viability and credibility of 'Hindu' IMs that may not be relevant in the Islamic world.

Absence of size criteria for a 'movement'

One significant question struck me as I read *UIM*. I began to wonder: how many people, fellowships, or *somethings* would be needed for something to properly qualify as an Insider *Movement*? I couldn't find an answer anywhere in the book (or anywhere else in IM literature). I have already posted discussion of this concern at http://btdnetwork.org/when-does-a-movement-count-as-a-movement/. Interested readers can see it there.

Insider Movements versus Insider Paradigm

Recent evidence (such as Naja's case study from Eastern Africa) credibly demonstrates the existence of some Insider Movements in which biblical theology and practice are joined with some form of Muslim identity. Yet the attempts of Western missionaries to develop and market an insider *paradigm* continue to cause concern among some, myself included. Harley Talman's chapter 'Historical Development of the Insider Paradigm' offers a window into some of these areas of concern.

Talman portrays the insider paradigm as rooted in Scripture and objections to this paradigm as rooted in 'the traditional paradigm of modern Protestant missions' (11-12). Many will find this claim unconvincing, as I note in the next section. He then builds his case on 19th century missions to Hindus (which, as already noted, I find unhelpful in discussion of Islam). When he shifts his focus to the Muslim world, he amply demonstrates that some Western missionaries in the 20th century proposed a paradigm like the insider paradigm decades before anyone claimed to have seen or experienced an insider movement. In doing so, Talman acknowledges and clearly demonstrates that Western missiological theory and effort influenced the emergence of IMs among Muslims. Contrary to some pro-IM claims that Westerners were simply reporting 'descriptively' the spontaneous appearance of

IMs, Harlan shows plainly that Western missiological theory long preceded the rise of indigenous IMs. He summarises: 'By tracing the preceding historical developments, we can see how missiological thinking was making room for IMs. The question of linkage has not been adequately studied, but it is only since the 1980's that we have witnessed the birth of such movements in the modern era' (21).

In IM-related discussions of recent years, proponents of IM have often pointed out the inaccurate phrasing of critics attacking 'the Insider Movement', as if IM were one monolithic entity. The common refrain is that IMs are *plural*, and not all identical. Talman's article brings additional precision to this facet of the discussion, by clarifying that while IMs are plural, there does exist a singular 'paradigm of mission' (19), described by its proponents as 'the insider paradigm'. Apparently some of the concerns that have been raised concerning IM could have been more precisely aimed toward this IP (Insider Paradigm).

Misrepresentations of others' views

In seeking to establish credibility for the insider paradigm, Talman states that 'Influential publications have attempted to educate the Christian public', adding a footnote saying: '*CT* cast favourable light on IMs in an interview between Gene Daniels and a Muslim follower of Jesus.' (21) Talman, however, neglects to mention that this Muslim follower of Jesus *strongly objected* to *CT*'s misleading portrayal of his ministry and has subsequently gone to great lengths to clarify that his movement is *not* an IM and doesn't fit IM definitions. See, for example, 'The Cultural Insider; Theological Outsider (CITO)' (*IJFM,* 32:2. Summer 2015, 61-67), in which Abu Jaz explicitly states: 'our movement didn't fit with IM' (63).

One page later (22), Talman writes: 'Recently, scholars have suggested that the chief causes of the controversy may not actually be theological, but rather differences in personal preferences, mission paradigms, cultural patters, and worldview.' The sentence ends with a footnote citing 'Bartlotti, chap. 6' and others. This struck me as a misrepresentation of Bartlotti's article, so I wrote to ask his opinion on this portrayal of his view. He responded,

> I would not say 'the chief causes of the controversy may not actually be theological…' Instead, I would say that 'the chief causes are not only theological, but also reflect differences in….' The theological issues and differences are critical however you look at it.

In an attempt to minimize theological problems, Talman not only misrepresents Bartlotti's view, but also (with the phrase 'scholars have suggested') quietly ignores (as if non-existent) the vast number of scholars who have raised serious theological concerns about the insider paradigm.

Also on page 22, Talman refers to David Garrison's research, published in his book *A Wind in the House of Islam*. He claims:

> Garrison revealed that a number of [the Jesus movements in the Muslim world] were IMs. He had previously viewed the notion somewhat negatively due to deficiencies he presumed to be inherent in IMs, but his investigations showed that his concerns were unfounded, and he was amazed by what God was doing among insiders.

This claim struck me as dubious, so I wrote David Garrison to ask, 'Do you consider this an accurate portrayal of your change in perspective'? Garrison responded:

> No, I would not characterise that as an accurate presentation of my views; much too glossed and simple. What I've observed is: 1) Since I limited my surveys to movements with baptized believers, they would likely not even meet the criteria for being IMs. 2) The most deeply contextualized movements I surveyed, had a strong antipathy toward Islam as a religion, and the prophet Muhammad. They stayed deep within their culture in order to win as many as possible.

The serious misrepresentation of the views of numerous writers (Garrison, Jaz and Bartlotti above, and Paige – below) constitutes a very disappointing record of credibility claims in support of IM.

Slanting and choosing evidence selectively

In addition to misrepresenting the views of other published writers, *UIM's* attempts to promote the insider paradigm often seem to result in subtle slanting of available evidence. Talman illustrates this in clarifying his statement that 'those from the world's present-day 'major religious traditions' of Islam, Hinduism Judaism and Buddhism have shown far less openness to the gospel, especially when it has been presented as available only within the religion of Christianity.' (pp.20) His footnote claims, 'The exceptions occur in cases of oppression and severe disillusionment, desperation or trauma.' He cites as examples the Muslim Berbers, Hindu Dalits and Muslim Iranians.

Notably, Talman's 'exceptions' constitute significantly large numbers of people. And he doesn't mention the millions of Javanese Muslims who converted in the 1960's or the millions of Muslims who have become Christians–both individually and in groups–in other parts of the world in the past 50 years. As far as I'm aware, the *vast majority* of Muslims who have come to faith in Christ have chosen a Christian or religiously 'fuzzy' identity. Those retaining a distinctly Muslim identity constitute (unless I'm mistaken) a small minority of Muslim-background followers of Jesus. Yet in order to advance his case for the insider paradigm, Talman dismisses the vast majority as 'exceptions' in order to present a much smaller group as a cutting edge of 'what God is doing' to bring Muslims to himself.

In addition, some elements of the insider paradigm and some (not all) of its proponents have (unless I overlooked them) been conveniently avoided in *UIM*. Such elements would include, among other things, attempts to show essential compatibility between Islam and Christianity (as in Mark Siljander's book *A Deadly Misunderstanding*), citation of the Qur'an next to the Bible as a source of spiritual authority (though if asked for clarification, the Qur'an is not the '*final* authority'), viewing Christ's deity and the Trinity as optional or secondary issues, and attempts to encourage a high view of Muhammad (as, for example, in Talman's 'Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?' *IJFM,* 31:4. Winter 2014, 169-190). By not mentioning the more controversial and problematic views and practices of some proponents of the insider *paradigm*, *UIM*'s editors put forth the best possible face of Insider *Movements*. I consider this reasonable, as I wouldn't want biblically sound movements to be tainted by suspicion of theological compromise, or nascent movements to be critiqued by a standard of Western theological 'maturity'. At the same time, however, I wouldn't want anyone to believe that with the publication of *UIM* the insider paradigm has been accepted as part of the evangelical mainstream.

Weak biblical foundations

It appeared to me that some of the weakest portions of the book were found in Part 3: 'Biblical and Theological Perspectives'. First I'll mention three examples from Talman. In 'The Old Testament and Insider Movements', Talman states: (1) 'Many Christians today would have acted differently than Elisha' (53). This argument from silence also ignores progressive revelation. I would hope that in a great many ways, Christians today would act differently than Elisha did. (2) 'Jesus opposed the proselytizing of Gentiles (as well as Samaritans); his only requirement for them was simple faith' (57). Here again Talman argues from silence and ignores progressive revelation in order to advance a minimalist paradigm of Jesus' will for his followers in this age. (3) 'other religious traditions can even enrich our own spiritual life and worship' (56). This conclusion, based on limited data, presents a very general claim opening a door for religious combinations much wider than the New Testament suggests or would allow. Talman's suggestion could have appropriate applications but also very spiritually dangerous applications. He offers no distinction or even word of caution on the subject.

In 'Conversion in the New Testament', Roberts and Jameson build heavily on patterns related to first century Judaism to reach conclusions they generalize to any religion: 'So spirituality is not tied to social status, marital status, or religious community' (209) and 'Moving from one religious system to another is neither required nor encouraged' (210). Ironically, New Testament scholar Terrence Paige wrote a paper disputing such views. But Roberts and Jameson pull a quote from Paige's paper out of context and present it as if Paige supported their perspective.

In private correspondence, Paige wrote me: 'it is amazing that they quote me at all, apparently in support of their exegesis of 1 Corinthians 7:24 (209). Ironically, when I cite 1 Corinthians 7:24 in my paper, I say Paul was 'not urging them to be ethically neutral in regard to their culture' (15); and that there is no justification in scripture for a Christianity which 'surrenders itself to a particular social or (non-Christian) religious construct,' nor for any 'crypto-Christianity' (15). It is not surprising that they do not ever cite my paper again in relation to any of the other points the paper makes'.

As in decades past, the weakest aspect of advocacy for IMs appears to be the biblical foundation.

Conclusion

Although *UIM* consists largely of pre-published material and has some weaknesses, it presents the most complete and thorough explanation of IM available at this time. Especially in Talman's hands, it offers numerous dubious claims advocating for IMs. Yet it will serve as useful as a reference work for those who want to have in one place the best of arguments and explanations for Inside Movements.

Reviewed by L.D. Waterman

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