The
W-Spectrum:
Worker Paradigms
in Muslim Contexts

By Warrick Farah and Kyle Meeker

O ur own approach is C4, but we're not against C5ers..."
If you've been ministering among Muslims for any length of time, you've probably heard a colleague say something similar before. And you probably even understood exactly what was meant!

However, this statement actually reflects a misunderstanding and misapplication of the famous C-Spectrum (Travis 1998), which was originally proposed as a descriptive tool for classifying different types of indigenous "Christ-centered communities" in the Muslim world.[1] As John Travis himself notes, the C-Spectrum "is meant to show how groups of people born Muslim express their faith in Jesus, not how cross-cultural workers express theirs" (2015). (See all of Travis' reflection of the C-Spectrum on pages 358-365 of this issue.) It was never intended to prescribe approaches for expatriate workers.

While significant progress has been made in evangelical missiology on general contextualization, and much debate has swirled around the degree to which a Muslim-background believer can remain an "insider," less attention has been placed on workers' practices—and the connection to their view of Islam. Hence, in this article we seek to augment the overall dialogue by focusing on the worker.
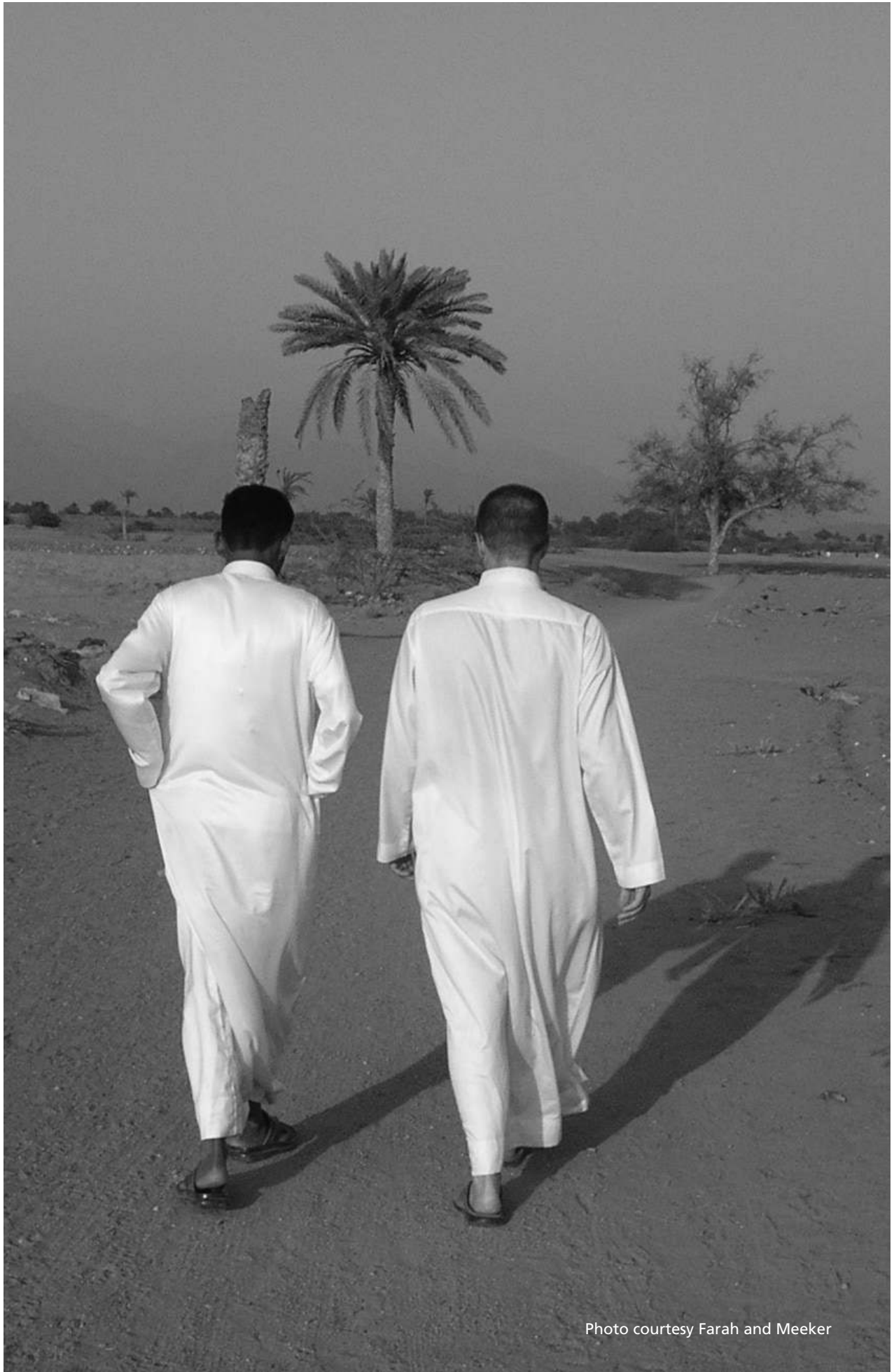
Photo courtesy Farah and Meeker

Recent Attempts at Delineating Worker Paradigms of Contextualization

While workers have been on the periphery of many discussions, they have not been forgotten. Martin Accad and Scott Moreau both make notable efforts to consider workers' paradigms (see also Schlorff 2006).

Accad provides a worker assessment tool and argues for a "kerygmatic" paradigm in *Christian Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach* (2012). His article classifies Christian-Muslim interaction along a SEKAP scale of approaches: Syncretistic, Existential, Kerygmatic, Apologetic, and Polemical. Not limiting the discussion to the evangelical family, Accad differentiates five mindsets that determine the interaction. He seeks to identify the theory that will offer the most useful praxis given certain contextual factors.

On the other hand, Moreau's *Contextualization in World Missions* (2012) surveys and categorizes ministry philosophies to create a map of worker presentation methods and styles. In contrast to Accad's focus on Muslim-Christian engagement, Moreau incorporates issues among all ministry contexts to map the broader contextualization terrain. Moreau discovered "six readily distin-

> **It is important to note** that the W categories do not correlate with the C-Spectrum. Instead, each segment of the scale corresponds to a general view of Islam.

guishable roles in the dataset: 1) Guide, 2) Pathfinder, 3) Herald, 4) Facilitator, 5) Restorer, and 6) Prophet" (2012, 195).

Both Accad and Moreau provide valuable insights beneficial to this discussion. Accad provides a "big picture" theory of general attitudes in Muslim-Christian interaction which intentionally includes a syncretistic approach. Moreau extends to general cross-cultural issues by providing "official" examples from the published positions and advocated procedures of mission agencies, prominent practitioners, and academics.

In contrast, by analyzing data from "on-the-ground" workers to test a spectrum of contextualization *practices* and *views*, the proposed 'W' (Worker)-Spectrum could fill a niche that these earlier authors have not explored. Additionally, the W3 category might fill a gap between Accad's Apologetic and Kerygmatic approaches (which are closely related to W2 and W4, respectively).

This scale is a tool that classifies four snapshots of evangelical cross-cultural *workers*' approaches to Muslim ministry. Our prayer is that the W-Spectrum will encourage missiological reflection and constructive dialogue, sharpening ministry effectiveness (Prov. 27:17). We earnestly hope this tool will not be used to define battle lines and attack others, as has often been the case with those who misuse the C-Spectrum.

The W-Spectrum Proposal

The W-Spectrum offers a scale around clusters of ministry mindsets and praxes within eight areas of contextualization: (1) Self-Identification, (2) Muslim's Perception of the Worker, (3) Discussion of Muhammad, (4) Use of the Qur'an, (5) Women's Attire, (6) Ramadan Fasting, (7) Prayer Forms with Muslims, and (8) The Relationship between the Father of Jesus and the God of Muhammad. These eight areas are each examined through four hypothesized groups that form a 'Worker-Scale': W1, W2, W3, W4 (see Table 1 on page 370 & 371).[2]

It is important to note that the W categories do not correlate with the C-Spectrum (i.e., W3 is not analogous with C3, etc.). Instead, each segment of the scale corresponds to a general view of Islam. This is important because "every attempt to evangelize Muslims necessarily rests on a particular understanding of Islam" (Skreslet 2012, Kindle 2878, cf. Accad 2012, 31).

On the whole, **W1** represents the most critical position: Islam is an idol that needs to be crushed and **triumphed** over. Since it is a lie and Satan is the father of lies (John 8:42-43), Islam is destructive to humanity, an oppressive spirituality. The Christianity presented in W1 is also the most confrontational,

> # The W4 position has the most positive and affirming view of Muslims in their various contexts, as "religion" is often regarded in a neutral or pejorative sense.

although W1 workers still care deeply about humility and compassion (as in each position). W1 aims for Muslims to become Christians who completely disassociate from Islam and join churches like the denominational or theological tradition of the worker.

The **W2** position is less aggressive in open interactions, but still seeks to undermine Islam by **replacing** it with Christianity. Apologetics are valued and used to show that Islam is an inferior system that diverts Muslims from knowing God. W2 believes Muslims should become Christians and join the established church whenever possible.

The **W3** position is more positive, although still critical of the various forms of "Islam." Thus, previously held religious practices and beliefs are not just rejected and replaced (as in W1 and W2), but some are even retained and repurposed as Muslims become **transformed** by faith in Christ. A term similar to "biblical faith" is preferred over "Christianity," since the W3 position deems that the latter is ill-defined and produces many misunderstandings among Muslims. In W3, workers aim for Muslims to become followers of Jesus who begin a process of transformation that eventually ends in indigenous fellowships.

The **W4** position has the most positive and affirming view of Muslims in their various contexts, as "religion" is often regarded in a neutral or pejorative

Table 1: The W Spectrum
Views and Practices for a General Islamic Context

	W1	W2
Model	Triumph Model	Replacement Model
Basic Description	"Christianity *triumphs over* Islam"	"Christianity *replaces* Islam"
Worker's Self-identity	"I belong to such-and-such denomination"	"I am a Christian"
Muslim Perception of Worker	Anglican/Protestant / Baptist/Pentecostal, etc.	Christian
View of Mohammed	*Oppose* Mohammed (he was false and evil)	*Ignore* Mohammed as much as possible (he is irrelevant)
Use of Qur'an	Avoid. The Qur'an is a threat and an opening for demonic influence	Minimize the use of Qur'an in evangelism since doing so may affirm to Muslims that the Qur'an is inspired
Women's Dress	Women dress as they would in their home culture	Women dress modestly, but hair is usually not covered
Ramadan Fasting	Fasting like Muslims during Ramadan is syncretistic and sinful	Fasting like Muslims during Ramadan is misleading (but not sinful)
Prayers	Continue to pray as they would in their home / denominational tradition	May change prayer style, but no Islamic style praying
View of 'Father of Jesus' & the 'God of Mohammed'	They are not the same; the god of Mohammed is a satanic deception	They are not the same; Muslims are gravely misled about God

sense. Muslims, in general, are seen as people who have positive spiritual impulses, but are missing the One who ultimately **completes** all those impulses. The result is a dialogical invitation to follow Jesus inside one's context. It is hoped that Muslims would become believers in Christ and form groups based on the Bible but are still socially and culturally "Islamic."

While there are distinctions between the views, there are important points of commonality. All positions believe in the necessity of the workers' love, godly character, and theological integrity. All workers want Muslims to love and obey Jesus. Additionally, all approaches affirm some form of subversion of the Muslim's worldview coupled with some form of exclusive fulfillment that only the gospel offers.[3] The differences are found in *emphasis* and *application* of specific

W3	W4
Transformation Model	Completion Model
"Biblical faith *transforms* Muslims"	"Biblical faith *completes* Muslims"
"I am a Follower of Jesus/Isa/al-Masih"	"I am *like* a Muslim ('one submitted to God') but one who follows Jesus"
A *kind* of Christian (or Monotheist)	A *kind* of Monotheist or Christian or Muslim
Agree with Mohammad when he agrees with the Bible (although do not acknowledge him as a prophet)	*Tentatively affirm* that Mohammad is a kind of "prophet" (although not in a biblical sense)
Some. Use Qur'an as a bridge to the Bible, which is biblically warranted and sometimes advantageous	Read the Qur'an alongside the Bible, but only the Bible is authoritative and the Qur'an is not inspired
Women dress in the local modest Islamic style and hair covering (if prevalent in host culture)	Women dress in the local Islamic style, including veiling (if prevalent in host culture)
May fast during all or part of Ramadan	Observe Ramadan in the same fashion as Muslims
May use Islamic forms during prayer with seekers	May pray with Muslims, but prayers directed to Jesus
They are sort of the same, but the focus is on knowing Jesus in order to know God	They are the same, although Jesus is the only way to truly know God and love him better

©Warrick Farah and Kyle Meeker

practices, as well as the distinction between new believers within their contexts.

It is, however, outside the scope of this proposal to outline a biblical case for each approach. Through both narrative examples and normative instruction, it would not be difficult to construct a scriptural framework supporting each position on the spectrum (this partly explains the reason for disagreements between workers). Two additional relevant issues include: (1) the extent to which the New Testament authors had variegated yet complementary models for mission (e.g., Bosch 1991; Nissen 2006) and (2) the extent to which con-textual factors and spiritual giftedness determine the paradigm of witness. The W-Spectrum is only intended as a description of four observed approaches

found among evangelical workers in the Muslim world today: the two poles of W1 and W4, with two positions, W2 and W3, in between.

In reality, there are numerous positions workers take, but for the sake of practicality, only four are synthesized. At the least, it is helpful to understand that there are not just two sides in the debate. In any case, each category should not be thought of as a tightly-defined set. The W paradigms are only approximations, with a lot of space for variation in between each.

Testing the W-Spectrum

But is this synthesis valid? Are the practices and views in each of the paradigms consistent with one another? Does contextualization in the Muslim world justify a four-part spectrum of W1, W2, W3, W4—or are the issues too complex and the approaches too diverse to classify with this tool?

To answer these questions, more than two hundred workers serving Muslims around the world responded to an online survey. (For a detailed description of the research methodologies and results of the project, see Meeker 2014.) The hypothesis is that since people operate from beliefs (that is, the ideas one embraces surface as identifiable actions), the data will critique the W-Spectrum, showing whether or not there is correlation with the proposed scale.

The eight areas of contextualization were addressed in the central part of the

The W-Spectrum provides evangelical workers with a synthesized approximation of their theology of religions.

survey, and each topic provided four possible responses that correlated with the hypothesized four-part scale of the W-Spectrum. To assess the consistency of responses, a standard deviation was calculated for each respondent. For example, if a respondent answered all questions within the same paradigm (all from the perspective of W1, W2, W3, or W4), the standard deviation would be zero, indicating no departure from the scale in their responses. A standard deviation of zero is the best-case scenario for supporting the W-Spectrum hypothesis.

The worst-case scenario for supporting the W-Spectrum would be for a worker to report as widely divergent responses as possible for the eight lead questions. If the responses were evenly distributed between the extremes of the spectrum (four for W1 and four for W4), then the standard deviation would be 1.6.

The lower the standard deviation, the better the W-Spectrum represents the worker's paradigm. When the results were analyzed, the vast majority of respondents' standard deviations were closer to zero than to 1.6. *With 88.9% recording a standard deviation of .8 or lower,* the W-Spectrum shows promise as a tool to describe an individual's ministry paradigm.

Potential Benefits of the W-Spectrum

The W-Spectrum provides evangelical workers with a synthesized approximation of their theology of religions. It is a popular-level attempt which uses concrete, familiar, and practical examples. Theology of religions can be an extremely complicated topic for workers to investigate (e.g., Kärkkäinen 2009).[4] The W-Spectrum offers a simplified tool for self-examination of one's own approach and also a way to understand others.

This descriptive scale could also provide teams with a template for discussing their ministry philosophy. How do they plan to interact with Muslims in their context? If they find that others on their team view issues differently and act in accordance with those views, what subjective response might that realization generate? How might this understanding impact the specific team and its interaction with other teams on the field? How respectful is the team to differing ministry positions?

The W-Spectrum could help expose areas of agreement and disagreement regarding ministry praxis. Then, ministry mindsets could be discussed to build team understanding and team unity.

Clarifications and Limitations

With support from the research, the W-Spectrum has promising, but limited potential. First, a clarification is in order. The scale is a *descriptive tool* for indicating what workers do, not a *prescriptive template* for dictating what workers *should do*. Explicit commands in scripture provide a black-and-white of praxis. Love, yes. Hate, no. Give generously, yes. Engage in adultery (spiritual or otherwise), no. But where exact parallels are not as straightforward, the implicit telos of the scriptural storyline needs prayerful, thoughtful, and communal attention to navigate the greys of praxis. A robust, biblically grounded, and culturally astute worldview is needed.

> **Contextual factors** play a large role in witness, so "inconsistency" would be expected in many cases.

Additionally, some of the categories could overlap and mix, and workers are encouraged to examine why they would be W2 in some categories, while W4 in others, for example. Contextual factors play a large role in witness, so "inconsistency" would be expected in many cases. Specific practices, such as women's dress, were selected as general representations across the Muslim world, but are not consistent in every context. A W4 mindset may look very different (literally) when applied to women's dress, depending on the local cultural expectations. Labels are helpful and often necessary in communication, but they can easily cause harm if misused as stereotypes. The point is to

inspire missiological reflection and Christological clarity, not to harden the positions or paradigms. Since there is a lot of space in between the paradigms, we encourage workers to identify nuanced positions such as W1.5 or W4+, for example, if they feel it would be helpful.

Since the W-Spectrum was written for workers in a "general" Muslim culture, it did not take specific cultural and regional conditions into consideration. In addition to the basic socioeconomic and political differences, cultures and regions exhibit identifiable variations that differentiate between serious adherents and nominal adherents, between those knowledgeable about the Qur'an or Islam and those who view Islam as cultural tradition, between men and women, or between Muslims who live with the visible presence of churches and unreached Muslims who live beyond the witness of a Christ-following community. The static nature of the W-Spectrum is therefore to be used discerningly with regard to context and the dynamics of communication.

Conclusion

Reflection on contextualization, theology, and philosophy of ministry is a healthy exercise. Multiple barriers impede cross-cultural witness among Muslims today. The importance of abiding in Christ and the biblical goal of increasing the worship he alone deserves necessarily influences the integration of workers' faith into Islamic contexts.

Yet this is true in all settings, whether "Muslim" or "Christian" or "secular." The radical call of Christ makes us uneasy in every culture (John 15:18-19; 1 Cor. 8-10; 1 Pet. 2:11-12). If it doesn't, we need to reevaluate our understanding of culture, or Christ, or both.

In the midst of this tension, God calls us to be on mission with him in order to minister for his fame and the good of others. Because of the cross and resurrection, we have bold assurance and humble expectation of God's redemptive mission continuing to all peoples. If the W-Spectrum assists workers to reflect on this mission among Muslims, it has served its purpose.

Endnotes

 1. The C-Spectrum still has value today, but is too simplistic and one-dimensional for the current discussions of socioreligious identity (see Green 2013).

2. Compared to the W-Spectrum tested (Meeker 2014), slight modifications in phrases have been made to aid in clarity.

3. The 'subversive fulfillment' perspective on other religions is articulated in Strange (2013).

4. For a more simplified approach, see Tennent (2010). The W-Spectrum does not, however, deal with the issues of salvation in "exclusivism" and "inclusivism."

References

Accad, Martin. 2012. "Christian Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach." In *Toward Respectful Understanding and Witness among Muslims: Essays in Honor of J. Dudley Woodberry.* Ed. Evelyne Reisacher, 29-47. Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library.

Bosch, David. 1991. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Green, Tim. 2013. "Beyond the C-Spectrum? A Search for New Models." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 37(4):361-380.

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. 2009. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical & Contemporary Perspectives.* Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic.

Meeker, Kyle. 2014. "Worker Praxis in Muslim Contexts: Discovering and Assessing Paradigms in Kingdom Witness." Talbot School of Theology, Biola University.

Moreau, Scott. 2012. *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel.

Nissen, Johannes. 2006. *New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives.* Pieterlen, Switzerland: Peter Lang.

Schlorff, Samuel P. 2006. *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims.* Upper Darby, Pa.: Middle East Resources.

Skreslet, Stanley H. 2012. *Comprehending Mission: The Questions, Methods, Themes, Problems, and Prospects of Missiology.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Strange, Daniel. 2013. *"For Their Rock is Not as Our Rock": An Evangelical Theology of Religions.* Nottingham, U.K.: InterVarsity Press.

Tennent, Timothy. 2010. *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel.

Travis, John. 1998. "The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of 'Christ Centered Communities' ('C') Found in the Muslim Context." *EMQ* 30(4):407-408.

_____. 2015. "The C-Spectrum: Original Purpose, Misunderstandings, and Limitations." In *Understanding Insider Movements.* Eds. Harley Talman and John Travis. Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library.

Warrick Farah *(pseudonym), DMiss., serves with International Teams in the Middle East, training leaders in discipleship and coaching community transformation facilitators. He blogs at muslimministry.blogspot.com.*

Kyle Meeker*, DMin, serves as a pastor at Northview Community Church in British Columbia. Warrick and Kyle are biological cousins.*

? Questions for reflection

1. Considering your context and spiritual giftedness, does any position on the W-Spectrum represent your approach to Muslim ministry? Why or why not?

2. How can you better understand and respect another worker who has a different view of Islam or Muslims?

3. Share some specific examples of why taking context into account would make you answer in different categories on the W-Spectrum. Is there another position that should be represented or reworded?