



June 7, 2011

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Dear Dr. Taylor,

Warm greetings in the precious name of Jesus Christ.

I am an Iranian Christian and have been involved in ministry among Muslims for fifty years. I served for 18 years with the United Bible Societies, being heavily involved in Scripture distribution in Iran, the Middle East and North Africa. In 1990, by God's grace, I founded Elam Ministries with a goal to strengthen and expand the church in the Iran region and beyond. One of the primary ways of outreach has been through Scripture translation, production and distribution. Elam has published nearly 1 million Scriptures in Persian during these 21 years.

I understand that you are discussing the issue of the 'Insider Movement' (IM) at your event, and I am writing this letter to express my serious reservations regarding this subject, particularly with regard to the altering of words in Muslim friendly Bible translations. I have spoken with many Iranian church leaders and I have not found one that is sympathetic to the movement. In the following paragraphs I would like to outline some of our concerns.

The Authority of the Word of God:

- **God's Word cannot be changed.** It is deeply shocking to Iranian Christians that some feel they have the liberty to change God's Word in order to make the Gospel more palatable to Muslims. Our methods must never compromise the inspired Word that has been passed down to us. To even have to write about whether we can and should change or delete words of the Bible in order to make it easier for people to accept is most disturbing. How dare anyone change God's Word in order to make it better? Does anyone really think they can do a better job than what the Holy Spirit inspired? We must always be faithful to represent the Word of God accurately and faithfully. As Christians we are not free to change the teachings that have been handed down to us, but we stand in a line stretching back to the

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apostles and the church fathers, and our duty is to faithfully witness to what we have received. So as the Scriptures were recognised by the early church and have been passed down to us it is not our job to change them to suit an audience.

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Doctrine:

- **Legitimizing Muhammad, the Qur'an and Islam weakens proclamation of Jesus and the Cross:** As we understand it, the IM at its extreme legitimizes both Muhammad as a prophet, and the Qur'an as a valuable text for spiritual inspiration that points to Jesus. To us who are working in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is neither acceptable nor Scriptural to legitimize a man or a religion that clearly deny the deity and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Not only do they contradict the Gospel, they deny the cross. Therefore, legitimizing their voice naturally weakens the message of the centrality of the cross and the work of Jesus Christ.
- **Sacrificing orthodoxy for methodology is choosing the wide over the narrow road:** Iranian Christians are deeply concerned that the IM is sacrificing orthodox faith and practice for the sake of a more convenient methodology. We cannot escape the fact that persecution is part of the history of the church and the calling of the church. Blessed are those who are persecuted, Jesus said. We are to not compromise our witness in order to avoid suffering—otherwise we will end up on the wrong road.

The Church:

- **Unity: There is one Church, one Body.** At its extreme, IM followers of Jesus don't want to be called 'Christian', perhaps because they find the words 'Christian' and 'Church' offensive. As a result, they remain inside the Mosque and the culture of Islam. This poses major questions of how they will relate to the body of Christ. Do they want to be recognised as brothers and sisters in Christ, a part of the global family of God? And if they remain within Islamic culture and practice, how will they ever experience the community and fellowship necessary for maturity and discipleship? There is a grave danger that the IM will produce 'disciples' that do not want to relate to the global church – and this will have tragic consequences.
- **Identity: Words have meaning—The word 'Muslim' cannot be disassociated from Islam.** We cannot play semantics with the word 'Muslim'. We cannot divorce the word 'Muslim'—'Submitted to God'—from all the religious connotations that come with it. The meaning of the word is now fully and inextricably linked to the Islamic religion. To

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identify as a Muslim is to identify with Islam—a religion that has stood from its inception against the church and her teachings. A related question with serious consequences is what will be the identity of the children of IM ‘followers of Jesus’? Will they consider themselves Muslims or Christians?

- **Witness: Our stand for the Jesus of the Bible must be clear.** Because the Word ‘Muslim’ is always tied to Islam, it is therefore disingenuous for someone who is a disciple of Jesus to say ‘I am a Muslim’ when they are not. Furthermore, the label ‘Muslim follower of Jesus’ is confusing and contradictory. It can only lead to a lack of identity and a poor witness.

In closing, let me state that we believe that outreach to Muslims needs to happen in a way that is **contextualized, but not compromising**. Also, when Muslims come to Christ, we must recognize that there should be both **continuity and discontinuity**. That is, we must recognise and encouraged the continuation of aspects of a person’s culture that are good, healthy, praiseworthy and Biblical. At the same time, we must identify aspects of culture that are unhealthy and unbiblical, and encouraged transformation in these areas. Above all, our witness must be **faithful, not necessarily successful**. We should leave the results to God—having faith in the work of the Holy Spirit as we preach Christ and him crucified.

Yours in His Grace,



Rev. Sam Yeghnazar
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