

The Jew a Jew, the Muslim a Muslim? Paul, mission and *Taqiyya* in the context of 1 Corinthians 9

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Zusammenfassung

Résumé

Cet article traite d'une critique faite par les musulmans à l'encontre de Paul qui, en 1 Corinthiens 9, enseigne la dissimulation (*Taqîya* dans l'islam) dans le domaine religieux et des missionnaires – des *Insider Movements* en particulier – qui, dans un contexte musulman, ont de tout temps fait de cette pratique une stratégie missionnaire. Paul donne l'impression de passer d'une religion à l'autre – juif un jour, païen le lendemain, et vice-versa – dans le but d'attirer les gens dans le christianisme par la ruse. Mais une lecture plus attentive de ce chapitre replacé dans son contexte montre que Paul met avant tout l'accent sur l'essence même de la foi chrétienne, tout en affirmant qu'il est prêt à renoncer à tout ce qui pourrait empêcher l'un ou l'autre de voir Dieu en Christ. Il ne nie jamais sa totale allégeance à Jésus-Christ et à la croix et se dit même prêt à souffrir pour cette confession. Il n'est pas malhonnête à ce sujet ; simplement, il subordonne toute chose à l'essence de l'Évangile. L'auteur étudie les conséquences de cette conclusion pour la missiologie contextuelle et le rapport entre les *Insider Movements* et la *Missio Dei*.

Summary

This article deals with an Islamic criticism that Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 is professing religious dissimulation – in Islam called *Taqiyya* – and that in Islamic contexts throughout history missionaries, and the so-called Insider Movements in particular, have adopted this as their missionary strategy. Paul seems to change his religion from Jew to Gentile and vice versa in order to trick people into Christianity. A more careful reading of this passage in context, however, shows that Paul primarily emphasizes the essence of the Christian faith while he is willing to give up anything that might hinder people from seeing God in Christ. He never denies his full allegiance to Jesus Christ and the cross, and is even willing to suffer for this confession. He is not dishonest about it, but he merely makes everything subordinate to this essence of the gospel. The author discusses the consequences of this conclusion for contextual missiology and the Insider Movements in relation to the *Missio Dei*.

Key words: Islam, Christian Mission, Insider Movements, *Taqiyya*, religious dissimulation, contextualization, 1 Corinthians 9

1. Introduction

Does Paul encourage Christians to be dishonest about their true intentions and beliefs, in order to trick people into the Christian faith? That is – at least to some people – the impression they get from 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul seems to be saying that he changes his faith and behaviour depending on the people he meets, all for the sake of winning people for Christ. To the Jews he became a Jew, 'in order to win Jews', to those under the law he

became as one under the law (though being himself not under the law), to 'win those under the law'. To those outside the law he became as one outside the law (but himself 'not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ'), that he might 'win those outside the law'. To the weak he became weak, to 'win the weak'. In short, Paul claims that he became 'all things to all people, that by all means' he 'might save some'. It is all for the sake of the gospel, that Paul may 'share with them in its blessings' (1 Cor 9:20-22). Is that not dishonest? Pretending you are a Jew or a Gentile, while you admit you are not, in order to lure people into becoming Christians?

A number of years ago, Suleyman Turan analysed Paul's missionary theology in 1 Corinthians 9 from a Muslim perspective and compared it with Islamic Da'wah, the invitation of God to humankind to embrace Islam.¹ He criticizes Paul for being dishonest and hypocritical. It is not Paul's missionary agenda as such that is the problem, for all religions somehow claim to have a universal message; it is Paul's approach that does not harmonise with Islamic practice and belief.² Paul wanted so much to win both the Jews and the Gentiles that he behaved like a chameleon. Apparently, Paul is willing to pretend to adopt not only the cultural customs, but also the beliefs of his audience, in order to win them for Christianity. The first is legitimate 'inculturation', 'the message must be presented suitable to its cultural forms',³ the second is something that Islam – according to Turan – would never accept. The prophet Muhammad is supposed to have said that 'The worst of people (in the sight of Allah and on the Day of Resurrection) is the two-faced who comes to these people with one face and to others with another.'⁴ Turan claims that this is exactly what Paul is promoting.

He emphasizes that in Islam it is unacceptable to win adherents by completely altering your appearance in order to please everyone or even deceiving people by assuming a false identity in order to promote your message.⁵ Muhammad did not do this in order to spread the message of Islam.⁶ Therefore, Islamic Da'wah is different. It is a divine invitation to followers of other religions to become Muslims and follow the way of Allah.⁷ A Muslim is expected to be open about his faith and to deny it is a grave sin.⁸ The Qur'an strongly condemns religious hypocrites.⁹ Communicating your faith or practice 'deviously' in order to convert others to your religion is a form of 'compulsion' – or coercion – 'in religion', which the Qur'an forbids.¹⁰ Because of this, Turan considers Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians 9 a form of – what is called in Islam – *taqiyya* or religious dissimulation, which is not allowed.¹¹

Turan's interpretation and rejection of Paul's missionary strategy is still relevant in the context of Christian missions today, for he identifies two (contemporary) examples of this approach. First of all, according to Turan it has been adopted by missionaries

¹ Turan 2009. For Da'wah see Turan 2009: 208 and Canard: SIM 1738.

² Turan 2009: 195.

³ Turan 2009: 197.

⁴ Turan 2009: 212; *Chapter of Judgments* 27, Sahih al-Bukhari 7179, Book 93, hadith 42 and *Chapter of Good Manners* 52, Sahih al-Bukhari 6058, book 78, hadith 88.

⁵ Turan 2009: 212.

⁶ Turan 2009: 211.

⁷ Turan 2009: 208; Qur'an: Surat *An Nahl* 16:125; *Al Hajj* 22:67.

⁸ Turan 2009: 210.

⁹ Qur'an: Surat *At Tawba* 9:101, *Al Baqara* 2:9-12; *Al-Maeda* 5:41; *Hud* 11:5.

¹⁰ See Turan 2009: 207-208; Qur'an Surat *Al Baqara* 2:256.

¹¹ Turan 2009: 210.

throughout history, pretending to believe what their audience believes in order to make them Christians.¹² Secondly, he recognizes *taqiyya* in Muslims who convert to Christianity and then hide their new identity, 'in order not to attract the attention of members of their former religion and to participate more effectively in mission activities'.¹³ Turan's criticism here connects with more general Islamic condemnation of Christian mission and the Insider Movements. Kate Zebiri has shown that, since Muslims normally see Christianity as 'an inherently Western phenomenon',¹⁴ Christian mission is seen as an extension of Western imperialism and colonialism by many Muslims.¹⁵ In this context the Insider Movement is simply seen as a new tactic in the same imperialistic agenda.¹⁶

2. Question

The main question here is, if in 1 Corinthians 9 Paul is indeed encouraging a form of hypocrisy or *taqiyya* in order to win people for Christ. The answer will help us consider if adaptive or contextual strategies in Christian mission and the so called Muslim Background Believer Movements should be considered forms of *taqiyya* and what the implications are for Christian mission in the twenty-first century. We first need to clarify what Turan means by *taqiyya* (2.1) and which possible forms of Christian mission (2.2) or Muslim Background Believer Movements could be considered *taqiyya* (2.3).

2.1 *Taqiyya*

Taqiyya is a complex concept and seems to be more prominent in Shi'a Islam than in Sunni Islam. It is the doctrine that says it is acceptable to conceal one's true identity in the face of a hostile environment, in order to save one's life or to 'preserve the Shi'ite community'.¹⁷ Therefore, Shi'a believers who lived in the context of a (hostile) Sunni majority were permitted to avoid practising certain (Shi'a) aspects of their Islamic faith.¹⁸ This helped mainline 'Shi'ite Muslims to reconcile political idealism with a de facto acceptance of the status quo' under Sunni rule.¹⁹ However, the concept is not unknown in Sunni Islam, although Sunnis have been critical of this doctrine, accusing Shi'ites of using it to justify dishonesty and hypocrisy.²⁰ The main principle for Sunnis remained that a believer had to be honest about his or her faith for, as Turan mentions, the Qur'an strongly condemns religious hypocrisy. However, in Sunni Islam *taqiyya* is only allowed when someone's personal life is

¹² Turan 2009: 206.

¹³ Turan (2009: 206-207) refers to Barrett and Johnson 2001, who claim that '14 million Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims have hidden the fact that they became a Christian'. It is unclear whether the conclusion that this happens in order not to draw attention from Muslims and to be more effective in mission is drawn by Turan himself or by Barrett and Johnson, for the online reference is no longer available.

¹⁴ Zebiri 2001: 179-181.

¹⁵ Zebiri 2001: 181-188. Because of this perceived identification of Christianity and the West, leaving Islam to many Muslims implies a defection to the (imperialistic) West.

¹⁶ Zebiri 2001: 86: M.A. Anees calls it a 'crypto-Muslim strategy'.

¹⁷ Brown 2017: 158; Rippin 2005: 128.

¹⁸ Howarth 2011: 218.

¹⁹ Brown 2017: 158. Esposito (2005: 45, 48) emphasizes that *taqiyya* is a 'common Shii practice that permits concealment of one's belief for self-protection or survival as a persecuted minority in a hostile world'.

²⁰ Howarth 2011: 219.

threatened, like in Spain after the Reconquista, when Muslims were given the option to convert to Christianity or be killed.²¹ The crucial factor in all of this is the intention of the heart. If someone's life is almost certainly at stake, then the obligation 'to fight for the faith with hand or tongue' is dropped as long as the heart is faithful.²² That is what God looks at and accepts.²³ Thus it seems that *taqiyya* is almost never accepted by mainline Muslims, either Shi'a or Sunni, when it is meant to simply hide one's faith in ordinary situations or to conceal evil and inflict harm on others. Martin Accad summarises that the Qur'an knows only two possible fates for those who denied their faith: 'Those who deny with their tongue while still believing in their hearts have committed no wrong. Whereas those who deny God with their tongue and dwell in their unbelief in their hearts will be punished in eternity.'²⁴

After the attacks on New York on 11 September 2001 the issue of *taqiyya* was put on the political agenda in Western societies. Some Christians and right-wing politicians in the USA and Europe raised the concern that every Muslim is allowed to lie about his true intentions to advance Islam in the West. The Dutch politician Geert Wilders introduced the concept of *taqiyya* in a debate in the Dutch parliament, claiming that every Muslim knows the concept, even if they do not apply it.²⁵ Others have claimed that Muslims can dissimulate their faith whenever they want, in order to eventually conquer the world.²⁶ The implications are that one can never trust a Muslim.

When we look at the true meaning of *taqiyya* it is clear that these Western interpretations do not hold. It does not mean that Muslims would not claim a divine right to lie on the basis of the Qur'an in order to mislead people or advance Islam, but it is not in line with mainstream Islam, whether Sunni or Shi'a. It also does not mean that Muslims never lie, but lying at will because it suits a particular Muslim agenda does not seem to be in line with the general principles of the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition. Every religion and every society is familiar with the idea of an 'honourable lie', which is allowed in situations when speaking the truth is dangerous for the believer or others who depend on them. The classic example is hiding a Jewish person for the Nazis during the Second World War in Europe. In Islam, however, this is never called *taqiyya*. The normal principle is telling the truth.²⁷

In this light it seems that Turan is blaming Paul for promoting illegitimate *taqiyya*, that is, *taqiyya* in an ordinary, not life-threatening situation.²⁸ And he sees this behaviour repeated in Christian missionaries in history and in Muslim Background Believers.

²¹ Peters 2003: 180.

²² Strothmann and Djebli 2012; cf. Accad 2017, Peters 2003: 180.

²³ Cf. Surat *an-Nahl* 16:106-107 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali): 'Anyone who, after accepting faith in Allah, utters unbelief under compulsion, his heart remaining firm in faith shall be absolved, but such as open their breast to unbelief – on them is the wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a dreadful penalty. This is because they love the life of this world better than the hereafter: and Allah will not guide those who reject faith'; cf. Accad 2017.

²⁴ See also 'Al-Taqiyya, Dissimulation' Part 1-4.

²⁵ <https://www.hpdetijd.nl/2010-11-12/wat-zei-wilders-over-taqiyya/> (accessed 08/12/20).

²⁶ See Accad 2017, who refers among others to Sookhdeo 2007: 196-209 and to Ben Carson introducing the idea in his presidential campaign in 2015.

²⁷ Howarth 2011: 230.

²⁸ Turan is not fully clear on this. He simply seems to reject *taqiyya* in general, although indirectly it could be seen as a rejection of *taqiyya* only in situations which are not life threatening. Most Muslims would accept some kind of *taqiyya* when their or other believers' lives are at stake. I have the impression that Turan is not rejecting this per se.

2.2 Christian mission as ‘tentmaking’

When Turan accuses Christian missionaries throughout history of hiding their true identity in order to reach others with the gospel of Christ, he seems to touch upon what missiology calls ‘tentmaking’. Paul mentions several times that he provided for his own income by ‘working with his hands’ (1 Cor 4:12) and although he does not mention exactly what he was doing, in Acts 18:3 he is called a maker of tents (σκηνοποιός, Acts 18:3).²⁹ Since Paul was also working hard to spread the gospel and evangelise Jews and Gentiles, the term ‘tentmaker’ is used in missiology as a term for Christians who support themselves by working in a ‘regular’ profession in order to create opportunities to share the gospel.³⁰ Apart from the rationality that missionaries who have no other funding can provide for themselves through a regular profession, this practice often has a sense of secrecy. Many (Islamic) countries are closed to (Western) missionaries. But in line with Paul’s argument in Romans 10:14, the only option for missionaries to bring the gospel into these countries is to go under the pretence of being a teacher, student or medical worker. The perceived urgency of reaching people for Christ who otherwise would be lost forever, then somehow justifies this dishonesty. Is this therefore a form of *taqiyya*? It seems that for Paul ‘tentmaking’ was neither a missionary strategy nor a way of illegally entering closed territories; his reason was primarily that he could provide for himself in this way, so that he did not need to depend financially on his congregations (1 Th 2:9).³¹

Fairly recently the new concept of Business as Mission was introduced into Christian missions. This approach builds on the idea of tentmaking, yet moves beyond it. It has been called ‘evangelizing in the marketplace’³² but it is more holistic than that. The idea of Business as Mission is ‘demonstrating what the Kingdom of God is like in the context of business’, ‘engaging with the world’s more pressing social, economic, environmental and spiritual issues’.³³ It wants to contribute to a true and just society, based on the principle of faith in God through Jesus Christ, and it includes evangelism. It is a holistic approach and an expression of the *Missio Dei*, God’s mission to recreate his creation and restore it to his original intentions.³⁴ As in relation to ‘tentmaking’ we can wonder if Business as Mission should be considered religious dissimulation.

²⁹ There are various interpretations of tentmaking, such as weaving goats’ hair or working with leather. Lampe thinks of tentmaking from linen or cloth, cf. Tomie 2017: 93-94.

³⁰ Siemens (1997: 121-129, here 121) uses ‘the term *tentmaker* to mean missions-committed Christians who support themselves abroad, and make Jesus Christ known on the job and in their free time. They are in full-time ministry even when they have full-time jobs, because they integrate work and witness. They follow Paul’s model of tentmaking, for the same reasons he did it.’ However, Paul probably did not use it as a missionary *strategy*.

³¹ Tomie 2017: 94.

³² Buttler 1998: 3.

³³ See <http://www.businessasmission.com> (accessed 08/10/20). It is: 1. Profitable and sustainable businesses; 2. Intentional about Kingdom of God purpose and impact on people and nations; 3. Focused on holistic transformation and the multiple bottom lines of economic, social, environmental and spiritual outcomes; 4. Concerned about the world’s poorest and least evangelized peoples. Cf. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/business-mission-lop-59#1>.

³⁴ Reitsma 2020: 159-160. For *Missio Dei*, see also Tennent 2010: 54-59 (54), who defines mission as ‘God’s redemptive, historical initiative on behalf of His creation’. Cf. Kirk 1999: 25-30.

2.3 Insider Movement(s)

Turan also accuses Muslims who, after converting to Christianity, hide their new identity of committing *taqiyya*. Their primary interest is 'to participate more effectively in mission'. With this brief comment Turan refers to what has become known as the Insider Movement. It is probably better to speak about Insider Movements, for they are wide and very diverse, covering a wide variety of communities of Muslims who have started to follow Jesus Christ. This diversity makes it difficult to evaluate Turan's general criticism of these movements.

John Travis was the first to describe different kinds of Christ-centred communities developing in the Islamic world in his so-called C1-C6 spectrum. This spectrum tries to identify varying degrees of contextualisation, with C1 churches considered the least contextualised and C5 the most. The C6 Christ-centred community is the community of Muslim Background Believers who hide their faith in Christ, almost always for security reasons; they are the so called 'secret believers'.³⁵ This description started a huge debate about what came to be called the Insider Movements, a debate hindered by the lack of a clear description of the Insider Movements. Travis was also the first to try to define the Insider Movement(s). They are:

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 socioreligious communities of their birth, bearing witness to Jesus, their risen Lord and Savior.³⁶

If any of these elements is absent, Travis does not consider the community of believers to be part of the Insider Movements. Within these communities, however, there is still a great variety of interpretations of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad and the meaning of the Qur'an.³⁷ Some respect and honour Muhammad as one who has led his people from polytheism to the worship of the one God, others more or less turn their backs on him; some still read and respect the Qur'an to find some kind of (divine) wisdom, others reject it altogether.³⁸ The general conviction, however, is that 'Muhammad is not viewed as a mediator, intercessor or savior'.³⁹

³⁵ See Travis 1998: 407-408, Travis 2015 (II): 489-495. For an overview of the C1-C6 spectrum see Reitsma 2020: 113-132, esp. 118-119; I also discuss the relationship between the C1-C6 spectrum and the issue of contextualisation extensively.

³⁶ Travis (2015 (I): 8-9) distinguishes five dynamics or characteristics: 1. Following Jesus and the Bible, 2. Fellowship with indigenous leadership, 3. Spiritual transformation through the leading of the Spirit and the study of Scripture, resulting in certain cultural and religious beliefs and practices being retained, others reinterpreted, and still others rejected, 4 Remaining as witnesses, 5 Multiplication.

³⁷ Higgins, Jameson and Talman 2015: 45. See also the different case studies in Talman and Travis 2015: 83-165.

³⁸ Travis and Woodberry 2015: 38. Some Muslim followers of Jesus continue to use the Islamic confession, but replace the second part ('and Muhammad is God's messenger') with e.g. 'and Jesus is the Word of God'. Others no longer recite the confession at all. All reinterpret or reject what is not in line with the gospel, cf. Travis and Woodberry 2015: 33-34.

³⁹ Travis and Woodberry 2015: 38. Recent research of five communities of Muslim and Druze followers of Christ in the Near East by Porter 2018 confirms the diversity of these communities, their practices, their evaluation of Muhammad and the Qur'an, and their full allegiance to Jesus Christ and the Bible as the Word of God.

The Insider Movements have been object of fierce debates among Christians.⁴⁰ The general concern seems to be fear of syncretism, the creation of a kind of 'Chrislam' in which the uniqueness of the Christian faith and of the work of Christ is lost.⁴¹ Defenders of the Insider Movements deny this accusation, for the ultimate allegiance of the believers is to God in Christ and to the Bible. The two main reasons why these new followers of Jesus remain within their socio-religious context are that they have no other option⁴² and that they want to share the gospel of Christ with their community.⁴³ It is difficult to accuse these communities of remaining in their context in order to hide their faith, with the exception of course of the C6 communities of 'secret believers'. All others are very open about their new allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord, they speak about it and want others to hear the message.⁴⁴ Within their communities they 'are not ashamed of Christ, and many are bold Evangelists'.⁴⁵

3. Paul's approach: The Jew a Jew, the Gentile a Gentile (1 Corinthians 9)

First of all we have to look at what Paul is arguing for in 1 Corinthians 9. Is he indeed developing a missionary theology or even strategy in which he dishonestly pretends to believe the same as his audience, so that their objections to becoming Christians will evaporate? Does the goal justify the means of winning people for Christ? Or is there something else at stake?

3.1 Food offered to idols (1 Cor 8-10)⁴⁶

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 9 follows from what he has dealt with in chapter 8 and what he continues to discuss in chapter 10.⁴⁷ His letter to the Corinthians largely deals with issues that had been raised by the community. Here he is addressing the position of followers of Jesus Christ in a multi-religious society. Corinth was a flourishing Roman colony with a small Jewish presence.⁴⁸ The city was completely permeated with Hellenistic religiosity. There were many temples for numerous different gods and society was controlled by religious ideas and practices.⁴⁹ It was impossible to separate social life from religious life. If someone wanted to participate in society, this implied participating in the

⁴⁰ The main points of criticism have been collected in Ibrahim and Greenham 2018.

⁴¹ Higgins, Jameson and Talman 2015: 45. They do not deny that such 'Chrislam' cults exist, they know of two in Nigeria, but they do not consider them part of the Insider Movements. The trend they observe is that 'the closer people get to Jesus, the less important Muhammad and the Qur'an become in their lives', due to studying the Bible.

⁴² Since Islam is not just a religious conviction but a complete social identity, to leave Islam is 'to break with one's whole society', cf. Travis and Woodberry 2015: 32, quoting Martin Goldsmith. I would add that it also means their disintegration as a human being. Besides this, many Muslims cannot consider leaving their community without migrating to a different culture or country. Palestinian Muslims in Lebanon, living in refugee camps, are not allowed to live outside the camps and hardly ever get permission to migrate. Leaving their socio-religious context is no option.

⁴³ Cf. Travis and Woodberry 2015: 37; Higgins, Jameson and Talman 2015: 45

⁴⁴ Higgins, Jameson and Talman 2015: 45.

⁴⁵ Travis and Woodberry 2015: 35.

⁴⁶ For an extended interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8, see Reitsma 2020: 50-65.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 8-10 forms a thematic unit, concerning food and idol worship. In chapter 11 a new theme is introduced, see Reitsma 2020: 51 n. 9.

⁴⁸ Witherington 1995: Kindle loc. 708-709.

⁴⁹ Wright 1991 (I): 45-46.

many religious meals and festivals, varying from celebrations in honour of the gods to birth rituals, weddings, cremations and burials, and so on. Christians were apparently wondering what to do in such a world.

The discussion concentrates on eating food, specifically meat, which has been offered to idols (8:1, 13).⁵⁰ Is a believer free to do this?⁵¹ And does it make a difference whether this happens in a temple (8:10) or in someone's house (10:27)? Avoiding meals was virtually impossible, for it would mean withdrawal from society. Neither rich nor poor could afford to do that. The rich were expected to be present at social gatherings and therefore also at the religious celebrations. The poor depended on meals provided by their patrons in exchange for social and political support from their clients. Without these meals they had nothing. Meat offered to the idols could not be avoided. So, what should they do?

Paul argues that since 'an idol has no real existence' and 'there is no God but one' (8:4 ESV)⁵² believers in Christ have the 'right' to eat meat (8:9), even 'on location', in a temple (8:10). Paul's argument here is the central Jewish confession, the *Shema*: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one' (Deut 6:4 ESV). He quotes the *Shema* almost literally, reinterpreting it Christologically. He puts Christ right at the centre of the most explicit monotheistic confession, creating what N.T. Wright calls 'Christological monotheism'.⁵³ He adds two extensions to the Shema which are important here. First he describes God as 'the Father, from whom everything was created and for whom we exist'. Secondly, he goes on to explain that the one Lord is none other than Jesus Christ, 'through whom are all things and through whom we exist' (8:6).

| Deuteronomium 6:4 | 1 Corinthians 8:6 |
|--|--|
| <p>κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν (εἷς ἐστίν)</p> <p>κύριος εἷς ἐστίν</p> | <p>εἷς θεός, ὁ πατήρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν</p> <p>εἷς κύριος, Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ.</p> |
| <p>The LORD, our God is the only/one</p> <p>The LORD is the only (one)</p> | <p>there is one God the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist</p> <p>and one Lord, Jesus Christ</p> |

⁵⁰ *Eidolothuton* (εἰδωλόθυτον) is a combination of εἶδωλον and θύω. It could mean more than food, but the context shows it is about food, particularly meat (1 Cor 8:13), cf. Thiselton 2000: 617-620; see Reitsma 2020: 52 and n.10.

⁵¹ Most food was prepared in the temples, sacrificed to the gods and then eaten at festivals and social gatherings in the temple. Leftovers were sold on the market, Reitsma 2020: 52.

⁵² Literally: 'we know that there is no idol in the cosmos and there is no God but *one* (ὅτι οὐδὲν εἶδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς), cf. Reitsma 2020: 54 n. 20.

⁵³ Wright 1991 (II): 129 and 2013: 667; Bauckham 1998: 40, 45-79.

In other words, there are simply no other gods in the universe. God is the only God and there is no one like him and he is the Lord Jesus Christ. Idols – the Hellenistic deities represented by the statues in the temples – have no real existence (8:4 ESV), they are nothing in this world (NIV). Of course, Paul is aware that there are indeed many “gods” and many “lords in heaven or on earth” (8:5). Walking around Corinth you would encounter them everywhere, in temples, in the marketplace, at almost every street corner. Paul calls them ‘so-called gods’ (8:5). They are not real, but for those who worship them, they are real. People give them power over their lives by believing in them. Paul is not saying that for the Greeks other gods do and can exist. He simply emphasizes that this is what the Christian community believes to be true over against all rival claims. The body of Christ is convinced that only God exists, whatever the number of so-called gods around. And if there is only one God and idols do not exist, then eating meat that has been offered to these idols has no meaning at all (8:8).⁵⁴ The earth ‘is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof’ (1 Cor 10:26, Ps 24[LXX 23]:1). Food was created by God and cannot be ‘contaminated’ by gods that do not exist. This is affirmed and realised in the work of Christ, who is God himself, and through whom are all things, including food (1 Cor 8:6). This whole confession points in one direction only: believers have a right (*exousia*) to eat food offered to idols (8:9).⁵⁵ In this Paul agrees with those in Corinth who have the knowledge that there is only one God.

3.2 A right with a restriction

However, this ‘right’ comes with two admonitions. For believers who know that there is only one God and that idols do not exist, Paul adds a warning that ‘anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall’ (10:12). In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul uses the example of Israel under the old covenant as a warning that it is indeed possible for those who know the Lord to worship idols (even though they do not exist as gods). Israel shared in God’s salvation (10:1-4), yet failed to please him (10:5). They worshipped other so-called gods, like the Golden Calf (Ex 32), indulged in feasting and sexual immorality (1 Cor 10:7-8).⁵⁶ Therefore, if someone thinks that because they do not exist it is no problem to participate in the worship of idols, this person is going against the Shema and breaks the covenant. This still does not mean that food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything, but participating in idol worship implies becoming one with demons (*koinonia*, 10:20). That is falling into sin. It is impossible ‘to partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons’ equally (10:21). It would provoke the Lord to jealousy (10:22), the term used in the Hebrew Bible in the context of religious adultery and breaking of the covenant with God.⁵⁷

Secondly, Paul raises the issue of believers who lack this knowledge (8:7), who are vulnerable. For their sake he asks believers-with-knowledge to refrain from eating meat offered to idols. Believers without knowledge are still so accustomed to their previous worship of idols that when they see believers-with-knowledge eat food offered to idols in a temple, they will draw the wrong conclusion and think it is not a problem to worship these

⁵⁴ See Reitsma 2020: 56

⁵⁵ Reitsma 2020: 53-54.

⁵⁶ Cf. Reitsma 2020: 61 n. 42.

⁵⁷ See Ex 20:5; Deut 5:9; Deut 32:21. In Deut 6:15 it is used in the context of the Shema and the warning against the temptation to forget to fear and serve the one Lord and going after other gods (Deut 6:12-15).

idols alongside the one God.⁵⁸ Thus they would go against the Shema and defile their weak conscience (8:7). The conscience is a sort of internal moral compass or judge that gives believers insight into God's intentions.⁵⁹ Weakness here is an indication that the conscience is not properly functioning and pointing believers without knowledge in the wrong direction. The word 'defiled' is generally used in a cultic context, indicating 'desecration' or 'uncleanness'. Such a conscience is in need of purification; in a legal context it would be called 'guilty'. What is at stake here is relinquishing an exclusive dedication to the one God and Lord by recognising and serving other gods.⁶⁰ That is why Paul strongly warns against destruction or perishing (8:11). Therefore he calls upon believers-with-knowledge to voluntarily relinquish their right to eat when it becomes a stumbling block to a brother or sister (8:9). If knowledge causes people for whom 'Jesus died' to be destroyed (8:11), then this is knowledge that 'puffs up', it is not as God intended it to be. Knowledge is only sound when it is founded on love (8:1-3). Love is considerate to neighbours and does not want them to perish.⁶¹

For us this is the key to understanding Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 9. He concludes chapter 8 by emphasising that if food makes his brother stumble, he will never eat meat again (8:13). He is willing to give up his right to eat food offered to idols, not because it is wrong or defiles his conscience (10:19, 29), but because it makes his fellow Christians fall. They will perish, not because of eating meat that is supposedly defiled – food offered to idols is nothing – but because through eating they participate in the worship of other gods (10:19-20). Paul explicitly repeats his conviction that believers have a right to eat, even in the houses of Greeks (10:27). All things are lawful, even though not all things are helpful or build up (10: 23). Paul only calls for abstention when someone would point out that this meat was offered to the idols. Even then it is not because of the conscience of the believer but for the conscience of the others (10:27-29). Believers should not be stumbling blocks to fellow believers. If our actions estrange people from community with Christ (1:9), then we should avoid these actions or give up certain habits. That is not just true for fellow believers in Christ, but also for Jews and Gentiles (10:32). Paul's ultimate goal is that people will be saved (10:33); eating and drinking should be subordinate to that. If we eat and drink it should be done to the glory of God, with thankfulness (10:30-31). If it hinders people to know Christ, it is not to the glory of God.

The believers' right to eat, the conviction that everything is lawful, comes therefore with the condition that it should not lead in any way to the breaking of the Shema and to worshipping so-called gods, neither for the believers themselves nor for any other member of the Christian community. Neither should it become a stumbling block for anyone outside the Christian community: Jews, Gentiles and – we might add – Muslims. Anything that hinders people to have fellowship with Jesus Christ can and should be given up, for that is what Christianity is (or should be) all about: living the life God intended by following Christ.

⁵⁸ Reitsma 2020: 58.

⁵⁹ Cf. Reitsma 2020: 58-59, see n. 36, referring to Wright 2004: 102: 'Internal compass', and to Dawes 1996: 96: 'Internal Judge'.

⁶⁰ Reitsma 2020: 58. It is not about a believer who is being defiled or possessed by demons. Either eating meat is sinful, or it is not, independently of what the believer thinks of it. It is not the state of the conscience that makes something a sin for one person and not for another. Here it is about real sin, i.e. worshipping other gods.

⁶¹ See Reitsma 2020: 59-60.

3.3 Conclusion: *Taqiyya*?

So, is Paul hiding anything? No, he is not. Paul is very clear about his intentions. He does not steer away from the centrality of the work of Christ for salvation. He has been clear from the beginning of his letter that salvation is through fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:2, 8, 9), through the Cross. That is non-negotiable. It is impossible to have life without the one God, the Father, who is the crucified Lord Jesus Christ. In order to win people for Christ, Paul never conceals the central value and meaning of the cross of Christ. He preaches nothing less but 'Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1:23, 24). He emphasizes that he decided 'to know nothing among' the Corinthians 'except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (2:2). If people stumble over that essential revelation, then so be it. It is the only stumbling block that can never be taken away, for that would effectively eliminate the Christian faith. Eating or not eating meat, however, is relative compared to the essence of fellowship with the crucified Christ. 'Eating does not commend us to God' (8:8). Eating does not make a person better in the eyes of God, not eating does not make one worse. For whoever knows that there is only one God and Lord, Jesus Christ, meat is meat, even if it is offered to idols. A believer therefore has the 'right' to eat it, but at the same time is free to abstain from it and surrender this right. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul gives different examples of surrendering different rights. These rights are not the essence of the gospel.

In a similar way Paul can say that he is a Jew to the Jews, under the law to those under the law and outside the law to those outside the law, weak to the weak, and all things to all people, in order to win them to Christ (9:19-23). That is not relativising the essence of the gospel and pretending not to be a follower of Christ. It simply means that whoever believes in Christ has received the life that the law speaks about. Living like a Jew, keeping the regulations, does not add to that and not abiding by the Jewish law does not take away from it. For the living the life of Christ implies keeping the law of Christ. Whoever is free from sin does not transgress the law and does not become more holy by keeping it. Therefore Paul adds that he himself is not under the law, for whoever lives a righteous life through Christ does not need the law to address sin. Sin has been dealt with. It is like someone never jumping a red light. The law that prohibits driving through a red light has become irrelevant. That is not because this person is above the law; it does not imply lawlessness. It only underlines that the law is being fulfilled in his or her life through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8). The law itself was never able to realise this life, but only gave a vague outline. In Christ it has become a reality. Paul can therefore equally emphasise that he is under the law of God, for God's new life has become a reality in his life. Paul lives the life as God intended it from the beginning, in living the life of Christ.⁶²

The wider context of Paul's letters and what we know about his life only confirms the conclusion that he is not dishonest. Why would he otherwise want to make his fellow Jews jealous, hoping to save some through Christ (Rom 11:14)? Why would he be willing to suffer so much for this gospel? He was imprisoned, beaten, feared for his life many times, received the forty lashes less one, was stoned, shipwrecked, adrift at sea, in danger from rivers, robbers, hungry and thirsty and so on (Cf. 2 Cor 1:8, 9; 11:23-28). If Paul had

⁶² Reitsma 2014: 65-83. Christ is the fulfilment of law, that is, he is the reality of what the Torah is speaking about. The Torah gives a description of the life God intended from the beginning and what went wrong. It cannot give the life it requires. In Christ as the goal and fulfilment (*telos*) of the law this true life of God has been realised. Christ is the reality of what the law referred to.

downplayed or hidden the essence of the gospel in order to draw people into the Christian community, he could have limited or prevented any suffering.

We conclude, therefore, that nothing could be further away from Paul's missionary strategy and posture than *taqiyya*. If anything is clear from Paul's life, it is that even in situations where the majority of Muslims would permit *taqiyya*, that is when one's life is at stake, Paul continues his work as an apostle of Christ, whatever the consequences.

4. The Muslim a Muslim? Modern mission and the Insider Movements

From our understanding of Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians 9 we can draw a number of consequences concerning mission, Islam and the Insider Movements.

4.1 Theological inculturation

If Paul is willing to be a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles it seems fair to draw the conclusion that if he had lived in the seventh century AD he would have been willing to be a Muslim to the Muslims. He would probably have avoided pork, as Turan suggests,⁶³ and alcohol. Paul would have done anything to avoid stumbling blocks which keep Muslims from getting to know Christ. Drinking alcohol and eating pork might prevent Muslims from having any interest in the gospel at the outset. This is not just a matter of inculturation that Turan would accept.⁶⁴ Paul's exposition in 1 Corinthians 9 is also about a theological understanding of the gospel itself. Paul is not merely a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles because people need to understand things in their own language and culture. It has to do with the heart of the gospel. As Paul summarises elsewhere, '[t]he kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God ...' (Rom 14:17-18).

As a parenthesis, the attempt by Turan as a Muslim to understand and interpret a Christian text shows that it is virtually impossible to use the Holy Text of the religious other to illustrate, explain or prove the truth of your own faith. Most attempts to show the divinity of Christ from the Qur'an are hardly convincing to Muslims and often fail. Here, the attempt to show from Paul's exposition that Islamic Da'wa is more sincere than the Christian mission in history likewise fails. Interpreting Holy Scripture requires an understanding of the nature of those Scriptures and their place within the respective religions.

Accad shares an interesting experience he had as a young student of theology. One day, he was invited to an open debate session with Muslims in the south of Lebanon. He had prepared an airtight argument, based on the Qur'an. After he gave his exposition the local sheikh simply put his argument aside with the argument that it was arrogant of Accad to claim the right to interpret the Islamic Holy Text, for only trained ulama (scholars) are permitted to do this, according to the principles that are taught by Islamic tradition.⁶⁵ It shows both that faithful interpretation requires not only the understanding of the other's texts in context and history, but also that Holy Texts require faith to explain them. It is better to steer clear of this path and choose a different approach.

4.2 Trinitarian tawheed

⁶³ See Turan 2009: 201.

⁶⁴ Turan 2009: 197, 212.

⁶⁵ Accad 2019: 34-35.

The basic foundation for Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 is the confession in 1 Corinthians 8:6, the reinterpreted Shema: There 'is only one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist'. Muslims (and Jews) would have no objection to the first part since the core Islamic confession is that 'there is no God but God'. Even though Muslims would be reticent with addressing God as father, tawheed or oneness is at the heart of Islam. However, Muslims (and Jews) would have serious problems with the second part. For Muslims that comes close to, if not equals, *shirk*, the only unforgivable sin in Islam, ascribing partners to God. How much Paul tries to win people for Christ, he never compromises on this and would not have hidden this from Muslims, just like he did not hide it from the Jews to whom he became a Jew.

This is important when we think of mission in the twenty-first century. Mission is about the one God, who revealed himself in Christ on the cross through the Spirit. That is the rationale behind the centuries-old mission of the Church – if God had not revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ and not empowered the Church through the Spirit, there would be no mission. It is likewise the centre of the mission of the Insider Movements today.

4.3 Secret mission?

How to practically engage in mission is beyond the scope of this article, but a few things are clear. Hiding true intentions while sharing the message is not really in line with Paul's approach and should be avoided as much as possible. In general Christians will agree with Turan that it is unacceptable to win people for Christianity by deceiving them with a false identity or by misleading them about our motivations. This was clearly emphasised by a group of Christians and Muslims in the UK in the ten ethical guidelines they drafted in 2009. Guideline 7 says: 'We will speak clearly and honestly about our faith, even when that is uncomfortable or controversial.' And guideline 8: 'We will be honest about our motivations for activities and we will inform people when events will include the sharing of faith.'⁶⁶

Concerning the issue of mission in so-called closed countries, Christians should be very hesitant to be dishonest about their identity and it is up to individuals what their ethical space is concerning applying for a visa under false pretences. I would be very hesitant, since if found out, it is not a good witness to the righteous God who never lies. Yet I realise that sometimes it can be the only way to share the gospel with people. The concept of Business as Mission is more appealing to me, although I am reluctant towards the term itself. It could give the impression that business is only a means to mission and that, in my opinion, is dishonest, or even illegitimate *taqiyya*. Many Muslims who already consider mission part of the imperial agenda of the West would be confirmed in their conviction. Therefore, I would prefer the term 'holistic business', in the sense that the whole of the Christian life is missionary in character since it is part of the great Mission of God, the *Missio Dei*, in restoring his creation to its original intentions and in transforming human beings into his image. The centre of that mission is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified and raised to the right hand of God, who is returning to establish the fullness of that new life, his Kingdom. When Business as Mission considers itself part of this *Missio Dei*, it is honest and avoids any kind of *taqiyya*.

4.4 Insider Movement(s)

⁶⁶ Cf. Christian Muslim Forum 2009.

In the light of what we have seen of the Insider Movements, despite the various forms of criticism by Christians, we can say that there are hardly any forms of illegitimate *taqiyya*. The communities that are included in Travis' definition do not hide their allegiance to Christ. On the contrary, many are bold witnesses of their new faith, even when they stay within their socioreligious context. This means that they are not pretending to be Muslim while in reality they are Christian. They simply try to follow Jesus Christ within the context of their own culture and community. Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ is not the same as joining a form of institutionalized (often Western) Christendom or Christianity. For many people in the non-Western world religion or religious identity is inseparably bound to ethnic, national, social and family identity. Evangelicals in the West usually think of a Christian as someone with a personal faith commitment. Believers within the Insider Movements would in that case rather speak of 'followers of Jesus Christ'. Travis therefore considers insiders as persons from a non-Christian background who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour, but retained the socioreligious identity of their birth. They have not left the socioreligious context in which they were raised and have not joined a Christian denomination.⁶⁷ Muslim Background Believers are trying to find a way to express their faith in their own cultural and religious context, just like Western Christians have always done.

It is, however, true, that one of the reasons – if not the most common reason – which 'Jesus-following Muslims' give for staying in their socioreligious communities is the desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the people in their community.⁶⁸ That is even part of the definition of what it means to belong to an Insider Movement. In that sense there is some truth in what Turan thinks. These people are following Paul's example in becoming a Muslim to the Muslims. But contrary to what Turan assumes, these believers are neither secretive about this nor pretending to have a different religion. Just as in 1 Corinthians 9, there is something different at stake. The socioreligious context – including some outward rituals – does not determine their true identity; it is their allegiance to Jesus Christ as the full revelation of God and the Bible that is decisive. They are very clear and open about that.

Sometimes believers with a Muslim background do hide their identity. This usually concerns members of C6 communities and it happens for the sake of survival. When lives are at stake because people want to follow Christ, this might be the only way. This is true for Christians in certain very closed (and sometimes) dangerous Islamic countries or communities. However, it is not a missionary strategy, it is simply a way of survival. According to Islamic understanding, it could even be considered a legitimate form of *taqiyya*. This being so, however, for Paul and many other followers of Christ throughout history the normal way is to be open about their faith, even when it leads to persecution and suffering.

It is important to stress here that there are strong indications that insider followers of Christ do not stay within their socioreligious context to avoid suffering. Such criticism is regularly voiced against the Insider Movements by Christians,⁶⁹ but the evidence points in a different direction. Grant Porter's research shows that all followers of Christ in the five Insider Communities he interviewed were experiencing some kind of suffering because of

⁶⁷ For the difference in understanding the role of religion and the meaning of Christianity, cf. Travis 2015 (I): 7-8; Travis and Woodberry 2015: 34-35.

⁶⁸ Travis and Woodberry 2015: 37.

⁶⁹ Cf. e.g. <https://biblicalmissiology.org/2020/07/08/faq-on-insider-movements/>.

their allegiance to Christ. They even emphasised that this was ‘a common result of following the teachings of Christ’.⁷⁰ In summary Porter writes: ‘All endure some kind of suffering, many in the extreme ... and accept it as a normal part of life that one has to bear.’⁷¹ There are many stories of believers who experience ‘pressure that increases to full-blown persecution’.⁷²

All of this is of course not to deny that there can be believers from a Muslim background who do hide their true intentions and have the appearance of dishonesty. Such actions are not what we are describing here, it is not what Paul is promoting and we should remain critical of any form of dishonesty.

Apart from this some insiders make different choices. Not all Muslims who become followers of Jesus Christ stay within their socioreligious environment. Some also oppose the Insider Movements’ idea.⁷³ This only serves to show that the Insider Movements and the communities of Muslims who have started to follow Christ are quite diverse and complex. We should be careful not to judge what we have not engaged with or are not really familiar with. Only in meeting insiders themselves can we start to converse about the possibilities and limitations of contextual mission.

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⁷⁰ Porter 2018: 159.

⁷¹ Porter 2018: 190, see also 137, 150-151, 156, 159, 160, 162, 172, 177, 187.

⁷² Travis and Woodberry 2015: 37; Higgins, Jameson and Talman 2015: 44-45.

⁷³ Cf. e.g. Boualou 2018: 439-440; Sanavi 2018: 441-446.

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