

1 **OVERTURE 9** from Potomac Presbytery
2 “A Call To Faithful Witness”
3

(to MTW, AC)

4 **Whereas;** the Church is called to take the gospel to all peoples, including those who have
5 historically been resistant to the gospel,ⁱ
6

7 **Whereas;** contextualizing the language and forms of the gospel, while remaining faithful to
8 the truths of Scripture, is good and necessary for the advancement of the gospel,ⁱⁱ
9

10 **Whereas;** the Church must exercise wisdom in discerning appropriate expressions of
11 contextualization, reserving its public corrections for genuine and substantive threats
12 to the gospel,ⁱⁱⁱ
13

14 **Whereas;** in recent initiatives known as “Insider Movements”^{iv}, some groups have produced
15 Bible translations that have replaced references to Jesus as “Son” (*huios*) with terms
16 such as “Messiah” in order to be more acceptable to Muslims,^v
17

18 **Whereas;** these same Bible translations of Insider Movements have replaced references to
19 God as “Father” (*pater*) with terms such as “Guardian” and “Lord,”^{vi}
20

21 **Whereas;** these Bible translations are harmful to the doctrines of the authority of Scripture
22 and the deity of Christ, bringing confusion to people in need of Christ—concerns
23 that are held by many national leaders and Bible societies,^{vii}
24

25 **Whereas;** some PCA churches have knowingly or unknowingly financially supported these
26 Bible translations,^{viii}
27

28 **Whereas;** Muslims should not be denied a full and faithful witness,
29

30 **Therefore be it resolved** that the 39th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in
31 America
32

- 33 • Affirms that biblical motivations of all those who seek to share the good news of
34 Jesus Christ with those who have never heard or responded to the gospel should
35 be encouraged;
- 36 • Repents of complacency or comfort that keep us from a faithful witness;
- 37 • Declares, as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider Movement translations
38 of the Bible that render references to God as “Father” or Jesus as “Son,” so as to
39 alter the doctrines of the Trinity, the doctrines of the person and work of Jesus
40 Christ, or the doctrine of Scripture;
- 41 • Encourages PCA congregations to assess whether the missionaries and agencies
42 they support use or promote Bible translations that remove familial language in
43 reference to persons of the Trinity, and if so, to withdraw their support;
- 44 • Encourages PCA congregations to support biblically sound and appropriately
45 contextualized efforts to see Christ’s Church established among resistant peoples;

- 1 • Calls PCA churches and agencies to collaborate with each other and the broader
2 Church to discern and implement biblical authority in gospel contextualization;
3 and
4 • As an aid to greater gospel faithfulness, authorizes the Moderator to appoint a
5 study committee to report to the 40th General Assembly concerning Insider
6 Movements, including but not limited to the matter of Bible translation, the
7 report to include appropriate policy guidelines for Mission to the World and local
8 PCA churches, the budget for the study committee to be determined by the Stated
9 Clerk’s office based upon the standard formula used by that office.

ⁱ Mt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, et al.

ⁱⁱ Translating the Bible into the vernacular language is one of many examples of sound contextualization practices. Other examples relate to the forms of worship and ministry. When faithful to Scripture, contextualization not only helps people understand and embrace the gospel, it also celebrates the diversity of the peoples that God has made (Acts 17:24-28).

ⁱⁱⁱ A “genuine and substantive threat” would include altering primary doctrines such as the authority of Scripture, the Trinity, and the necessity of Christ’s atonement. When such threats arise, Christians are called to respond clearly, yet humbly (Mt. 7:1-5).

^{iv} According to one proponent, Insider Movements “can take place within any socio-religious context, Western or not (such as Russian Orthodox, Mormon, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Chinese Communist, etc.), as long as believers remain inside their families, networks and communities, retaining the socio-religious identity of that group.” (Rebecca Lewis, “Promoting Movements to Christ Within Natural Communities”, *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Summer 2007). In Islamic contexts where Insider Movements were first developed and are most prevalent, Muslims who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah are encouraged to continue to identify themselves as Muslims, consider the Qur’an as authoritative, and practice the Five Pillars of Islam, including affirming the confession that “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet.” These initiatives are also popularly known as “C5.” The term “C5” comes from a scale describing forms and patterns within various “Christ-centered communities,” with “5” designating efforts that encourage followers of Jesus to remain within Islam (John Travis, “The C-1 to C-6 Spectrum,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, October 1998). See also “Contextualization: Building Bridges to the Muslim Community,” by Jim Leffel, Xenos Christian Fellowship Online, for further descriptions of Insider Movements. Critical assessments of Insider Movements can be found in articles such as Jay Smith, “An Assessment of the Insider’s Principle Paradigms,” (April 2009); Basil Grafas, “Insider Movements: An Evangelical Assessment,” (August 2006); Timothy Tennett, “Followers of Jesus (Isa) In Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 ‘High Spectrum’ Contextualization,” (Fall 2006). All cited articles are easily found online.

^v Rick Brown, a leading proponent of Insider Movements, says “Muslims have heard that Christians call Jesus the ‘offspring of God’, and this has been presented to them repeatedly as exhibit A in the case against Christianity and its ‘corruption’ of the Bible. So there is a dire need to correct these misunderstandings and to invalidate the accusation in a timely manner. This can be done in communications of every sort, but *by all means it should be done in the Scriptures*” (emphasis added). His solution is to replace “Son” in the New Testament with more acceptable terms such as “Christ,” “Messiah,” or “Word” (*International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 22:3 Fall 2005, p. 95; c.f. *IJFM* 22:4). In keeping with these conclusions, Insider Movements have replaced “Son” with “Messiah” in Arabic translations of the New Testament. In Bangladesh, Insider Movements have done the same in their translation of the Gospels. For example, the key phrase in Mark 1:11, “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.’” (ESV) was changed to read, “You are my beloved Messiah.” When the American translation consultants, both connected to the PCA, were asked why they did this, they said Muslims would only understand the term “Son” as biological offspring, thus creating an obstacle for Muslims. This obstacle, though, is no different from that facing the Jews in John 5:17, 18 and John 10:29-33. Jesus knew that by using familial language to describe his relationship with God, the Jews would understand he was claiming to be divine. Yet despite the offense it caused the Jews, who even tried to kill him for it, Jesus affirmed his Sonship.

^{vi} For example, in Matthew 10:32–33 Jesus says, “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (ESV). In Arabic translations of these verses, Insider Movements have replaced “my Father” with “my Lord,” and in Bangladesh with “my Guardian.” Similar changes to familial language have been made throughout the Gospels.

^{vii} The potential for syncretism is evident from a survey of nationals in an Insider Movement in South Asia (Phil Parshall, “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, October 1998). Of these C5 adherents,

- 50% go to the traditional mosque on Friday.
- 31% go to the mosque more than once a day. They do standard Arabic prayers which affirm Muhammad as a prophet of God.
- 96% say there are four heavenly books, i.e. Torah, Prophets, Gospels, and Qur'an.
- 66% say the Qur'an is the greatest of the four books.
- 45% do not affirm God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- 45% feel peace or close to Allah when listening to the reading of the Qur'an.

Concerned about the influence of Insider Movements in his homeland, a Bengali Christian leader wrote, “We have to protect the Book and its teachings. Somebody will miss-explain it, organize churches in the wrong way, and present Christ wrongly – seeing all these we cannot remain silent and unnoticed. Already we are bearing the allegation and condemnation from Muslims that we are changing the Bible. Carelessness is being [perceived by Muslims] among the Christian Churches in Bangladesh” because of the translation by Insider Movements. Further, Bengali Muslims incorrectly assume the tactics of Insider Movements are “a conspiracy by Christian churches, so the churches are being attacked and Christians are under fear.” (“How To Confront C5 Threat?” unpublished paper, 2005).

^{viii} Insider Movements are largely—and ironically—funded, trained, and encouraged by outside agencies. Anecdotal reports indicate that most of this support comes from the U.S., including PCA congregations. However, connection with Christian churches typically ends with their sending money. Though Insider Movements are influenced by Western advocates, they intentionally isolate their followers from local or global Christians, including pastors and theologians. Further, they do not reference the historic creeds and confessions of the Church, even the most ancient creeds accepted by the universal Church. As one proponent put it, “The interaction of C5 believers with outside Christians and theologians is very limited.” (John Travis, “Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Spring 2000). Not only does this isolation deny followers the necessary, mutual correction of the broader Church, it harms the unity and witness of the Body of Christ that Jesus prays for: “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21).