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## THE STA<sup>synthetic Triangular Approach</sup> IN ISLAMIC STUDIES AND MINISTRIES: A Missiological Attempt to Understand Muslims through the Concept of “Ordinariness”

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### NEED FOR MORE THAN CLASSICAL APPROACHES

Conventionally, classical approaches in Islamic studies are characterized by research methods that focus on the developments of Islamic ideologies and Muslim relations with the non-Islamic world in history.<sup>1</sup> Most of the traditional works on Islam in academia tend to discuss Islam’s religious ideologies or issues in Islamic history, including complex problems at present that are usually critical to political relations between the Muslim and non-Muslim (mostly Western) worlds. These studies, however, do not seem interested in delving into one important aspect of Islamic phenomena, that is, Muslims’ ordinary life experiences. While providing helpful information and stimulating insights into many complicated issues in the Islamic world, they are usually not much concerned with the dimension of ordinary Muslim life.

1. For example, in Western academia, the discipline of Islamic studies has had its primary interest in such areas as the historical development of Islam, particularly in the life of Muhammad, Christian-Muslim relations in history, Christian apologetics, Islamic theology and law, Islamic politics and resurgence, and the like (e.g., Bernard Lewis, 1993; Clinton Bennett, 1998; Montgomery Watt, 1961, 1985; Hugh Goddard, 2000; Ignaz Goldziher, 1981; Kemal Karpat, 2001; John Voll, 1994, Kenneth Cragg, 1985; John Esposito, 1988, 1999, to list a few). While these are very important studies that help to understand the Islamic world overall, their focus lies mainly on historical events, theological issues, political relations, and sociological implications, thus scarcely presenting cultural experiences lived by ordinary Muslims. However, it is not that there was no attempt to research Muslims’ ordinary life in Western scholarship. Though not many, there are outstanding works by non-Islamicists, which can help to glimpse the cultural and religious life in Islamic societies. Clifford Geertz (1971) is one of them whose anthropological work is of great help in comparing Islamic societies. Musk’s missiological work (1989) is also helpful, although it is focused solely on the Arab world. More recently and a bit differently from the traditional approaches, Clinton Bennett emphasizes a balanced approach between the “faith-sensitivity” approach and other critical studies on religions in general, particularly in the study of Islam (2010: xxii-xxiii).

Then, conventional studies of Islam may well portray Muslims as a people of exclusively religious ideology. Even worse, Muslims are sometimes presented in a reductionist way as violent people in fundamentalist spirit<sup>2</sup> The classical studies of Islam seem to make few contributions to appropriately comprehending and describing Muslims’ life experiences and how ordinary Muslims understand, view, interpret and live their religion in daily life.

Although there are outstanding descriptions,

2. This is often noticeable particularly among some Christians passionate about sharing the gospel with Muslims.

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analyses, and evaluations of the Islamic religion with its theology, doctrines, politics, economy, and other social issues, they often tend to provide a quite generalized portrayal of Muslim societies rather than presenting details, or what Clifford Geertz calls “thick descriptions” (1973:3-30), of Muslims’ lives. In the classical approach to the Muslim world, what some missiologists call the “people things” or “people factors” (Kraft 2008:39-41) is often missing or overlooked.<sup>3</sup> So conventional approaches do not seem to help outsiders grasp what ordinary Muslims experience socially and psychologically, how they experience their religion in daily life, and whether and how they struggle to implement their religious ideologies practically. The conventional methods do not adequately portray the real world in which ordinary Muslims live, nor do they elucidate how Muslims deal with discrepancies between the ordinary dimension of life and the Islamic ideal that all Muslims are supposed to pursue.

Even missiologically, Islam seems to have been studied and discussed without considering the people factors. Christians seem more interested in apologetical approaches to Islamic doctrines and tend to make more efforts to disclose Islam’s incorrect understandings of God and Jesus, and so forth. However, it seems unrealized that doctrines are only a part of Muslims’ concerns, and there are far more issues than doctrines that affect the lives of ordinary Muslims. Hence, this essay is concerned more with the missing part in studying the Muslim world. To examine this practical dimension of Muslim life, a non-conventional type of research methodology seems needed, which will help excavate Muslims’ cultural lives. Hence, the primary interest of this paper has to do with discussing a research methodology that will help understand the “lived experiences” (cf. Sauko 2003:39-73) of ordinary Muslims.

### “ORDINARINESS” IN STUDYING RELIGIONS

In this paper, I intentionally use the adjective “ordinary” and the noun “ordinariness” to indicate an aspect of the human condition inherent in human propensity. The noun “ordinariness” refers especially to the human condition that represents a general tendency of the human mind before it is formulated or empowered by any ideology or theology through a deep and long intentional thinking process. Thus, “ordinariness,” as seen in the common inclination of the human mind, is a natural condition; thus, an ordinary person is someone who thinks, acts, and does all common cultural things as a truly human being.<sup>4</sup> He or she feels awed and frustrated by various life challenges such as sicknesses, death, misfortunes, calamities, and the

3. Kraft emphasizes the importance of the people factors in studying human culture. “Though anthropologists have tended to spend most of their time discussing the structural side of cultural behavior, *it is the personal activity that is the most interesting*” (2008:44, italics are his).

4. Kraft also points out this as he states, “. . . personal activities are *ordinarily* engaged in habitually and in accordance with the customs of the society” (2008:44, italics are mine).

like. The ordinary man or woman feels his/her needs and seeks solutions (or “baraka”) from varied sources of power that are deemed helpful in coping with life challenges.

In this sense, ordinariness is common humanness that makes people truly human. Even highly religious or intellectual people possess the same. It is the state of mind inherent in every human being before being empowered and oriented by any ideology. People’s ideological understanding and knowledge do not eliminate human ordinariness since it is an intrinsic element of humanness. Ordinariness thus always remains within the person’s mind as a common human propensity, notwithstanding any seemingly extraordinary tendency that has been built and developed through external influences. So, it may be labeled as a “pre-ideological human condition” as opposed to an “ideal” or “desirable model.”<sup>5</sup>

Human ordinariness is such that its basic quality can be plain, neutral, and undistinguishable, often passively ready to be influenced or empowered by external ideologies, especially religious ideas. Hence, it is often treated as inferior to the intellectual quality that has been ideologically or theologically equipped.<sup>6</sup> However, this is a normal state of the human condition, common to all people. Even committed religious leaders are only the people whose ordinariness has been empowered by certain religious doctrines and their willing allegiance. In consequence of religious empowerment, the theologically equipped self has been ushered into a new dimension of its cognition, in which the pursuit of the religious ideal now begins to compete with the pre-ideological ordinary mindset. It is this ordinariness of the human condition that keeps producing “non-orthodox” or “unofficial” elements within “orthodox” religious boundaries despite guidelines that officially established religious institutions already provide.<sup>7</sup> This aspect of ordinariness in religion makes religious phenomena complex and thus deserves a close examination from

5. The significance of ordinariness was also discussed in the field of Ordinary Language Philosophy advocated by linguistic philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (in his later time) and his followers. In the early twentieth century, Ordinary Language philosophy arose as a reaction to such philosophical circles as Logical Atomist and Logical Positivists, who believed that the ordinary use of language obstructs “a clear view on reality;” hence the need for the construction of a “non-ordinary language” or “ideal language” that can deliver philosophical concepts. However, some philosophers refuted this view and argued that ordinary language is perfect for serving philosophical problems. For more stories of these philosophical views on the use of language, see <http://www.iep.utm.edu/ord-lang/>. Some caveats against Ordinary Language Philosophy notwithstanding, its philosophical tenet has cast a very helpful insight into the significance of ordinariness in human life in general.

6. Ordinariness is always short of the religious ideal pursued by adherents, and thus it is often regarded as inferior and even sinful. Devout Muslims or serious Sufis would try their best to replace their ordinariness with a profoundly intellectualized religiosity or spirituality. Muslim scholars would focus their teachings on what the Islamic laws require Muslims to carry out every day.

7. In addressing cultural features in the Muslim world, “folk Islam” has been used as a popular term to refer to “non-orthodox” or folk religious elements that reflect ordinariness among Muslims. Folk Islam thus should not be understood as a kind of Islam; rather, it needs to be treated as an idiom to underscore the ordinary aspect of Muslim beliefs and practices. For more details on folk Islam, see Kim (2016:55-58).

diverse research perspectives.

Our next agenda will focus on a research method that can help us know and understand the elements of ordinariness in Muslim life. While conventional Islamic studies are concerned mainly with Islam's religious or ideological contents, the approach I discuss here will discover and explain the elements of ordinariness in Muslim cultures. In other words, it will focus itself on inquiring into how Muslims experience their religion or religious ideologies in everyday life. It investigates how ordinariness operates in an official Islamic system and what religio-cultural features will look like when Islamic orthodoxy meets human ordinariness.

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This is an extremely important inquisition in the academic research for Islamic phenomena. Missionaries working cross-culturally in the Muslim context need to conduct anthropological research into how ordinary minds deal with official religious requirements. The anthropological research will help missionaries understand the cultural worldview of ordinary Muslims, and the anthropological understanding will serve them in figuring out a culturally and humanly relevant method for evangelism. Such an approach will also apply to the realm of discipleship for new converts, which requires a holistic approach. An ethnographic skill is also required to enhance the comprehension of the religio-cultural backgrounds of new converts. It is imperative to comprehend how the person's ordinariness has been operating in their previous religious life and how it will work towards their spiritual growth in Christ. In the following sections, I will apply this principle of ordinariness in the context of Islamic studies (or, more specifically, "Muslim studies).

#### **ORDINARINESS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN ISLAMIC STUDIES**

As mentioned earlier, the aspect of "ordinariness in Muslim life has scarcely been studied in classical studies of Islam. Even if we have recourse to ample literature in Islamic studies, it is still very difficult to obtain much information on Muslim experiences of Islam and their cultural psychology in coping with

various life challenges. Conventional approaches to Islamic phenomena do not seem helpful in grasping Muslims' lived experiences and cultural minds. We do need an alternative approach to carry out this task.

#### **The Synthetic Triangular Approach (STA) in Studying Islamic Phenomenon**

In this essay, I suggest that Muslim societies and cultures need to be researched with a research methodology that I call the synthetic triangular approach (STA) if we desire to produce as accurate a phenomenological depiction of Muslim life as possible. This approach aims not only to describe but also to understand the cultural experiences of ordinary Muslims. It is an integrative methodology that consists of three important research components: 1) literary research including content analysis and cognitive-philological study on the topic under investigation,<sup>8</sup> 2) an anthropological study with ethnographic fieldwork in the cultural area with which the topic is concerned, and 3) an interdisciplinary analysis of the data drawn from the previous two areas of research, as shown in Figure 1.

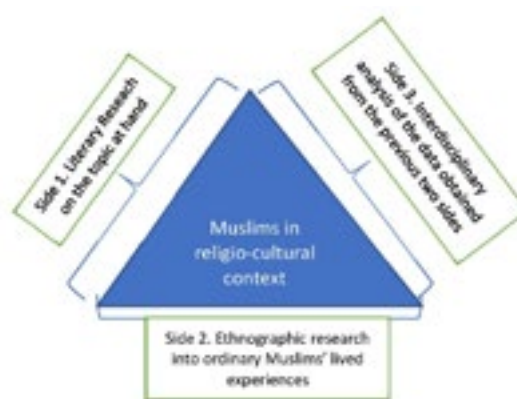


Figure 1. The Synthetic Triangular Approach in Studying Muslim Lives

The research process of the STA will look like the following. When the researcher identifies a research issue or topic in a particular Muslim culture or location, it is recommended that he should begin with a literary investigation relating to the research issue in question at that locality. (The more specific from the beginning, the better.) At this beginning stage, the researcher needs to know what Islamic texts speak about the issue to examine. This literary study includes the examination of Islamic canonical texts (both from the Qur'an and Hadith) and other Islamic traditional or scholarly documents on the topic. In this step, the researcher will be provided with the information of what the Islamic standards require Muslims to think and do concerning the religio-cultural issue under investigation. For the researcher to understand the

<sup>8</sup>. Here I mean by content analysis a data analysis method by which the researcher attempts to comprehend the patterns and latent meanings underlying the content of various materials provided by local religious leaders. Sometimes, religious leaders use their scriptural or traditional terminologies that require some philological studies for outsiders to understand better the historical backgrounds of certain official teachings on the topic.

official Islamic teachings on the topic for the study, he would also want to talk with Islamic leaders (such as local imams) with questions, and answers he obtains can go through a sort of content analysis to clarify the ideal position of the Islamic teachings (e.g., the four schools of Islamic shariah).

The next step is anthropological research, with ethnographic fieldwork, into the religio-cultural issue in question. This step is to understand how ordinary Muslims think and conduct in a particular cultural situation under investigation. An ordinary Muslim may lead their religious life more seriously or less religiously than others. The researcher will grasp how human ordinariness operates in a particular religious context through the research at this stage. Based on an adequate understanding of official Islamic views of a particular issue under investigation, the researcher can delve into how human ordinariness interacts with Islamic ideologies at its practical level. When properly prepared and equipped with a suitable field research method, the researcher will get a clearer understanding of what is going on in the minds of ordinary Muslims. He may come up with many enlightenments about the realities that ordinary people live and experience as "Muslims and ordinary human beings. Perhaps, the researcher will see a Muslim person different from one he has been conceiving of as a religious person of Islam. He will see an ordinary person whose inside is mixed up and filled with myriads of knows, feels, sees, and so forth, which are both religiously Islamic and merely human. Through this kind of research into people's ordinariness, he will encounter a real person, not a religious avatar created by a solely religiously or theologically filled ideology. The missional researcher then finds a way to approach the ordinary person, who was also created in the image of God just as he was.

Before thinking through a relevant approach to that ordinary person under or of Islam, the researcher will need an analytical process. Hence, thirdly, an interdisciplinary analysis should be in place to understand the dynamics between Islamic ideology and human ordinariness. The data drawn from the first two research steps need to be examined to know how Islam is practiced. In this process, the researcher will employ existing theoretical lenses to look into somewhat stratified layers of the ordinary Muslim mind. The findings from this analysis will provide intelligible and contributing explanations to the religio-cultural feature under study. The results of this analysis will be extremely useful to other disciplinary efforts, such as Christian anthropology, missiology, apologetics, and even discipleship. This step can also reveal significant gaps between the ultimate goals pursued by serious Muslims and the extent to which they can fulfill the religious requirements.

These three components in the STA are equally important to describe the cultural features of the Muslims under investigation as accurately as possible.

A fair and sufficient understanding of Muslim cultures will require such a careful study if the researcher desires to avoid biases and stereotypes as much as possible. Even the researcher's interpretation and explanation can become fairer than otherwise because the data collected and used for analysis are based on emic (insiders') views.

### **Examples of the STA in Studying Muslim Cultures**

In this section, let me briefly illustrate a couple of cases in which the synthetic triangular approach was used in studying Muslim cultures. One example is my extensive study of the Muslim concept and experience of "jinn in the Swahili context (Kim 2016). In my research into Swahili Muslims' experiences of the spirit world, I have first studied the Quranic accounts of jinn and the Hadith literature on the same. Then, literary works by Islamic scholars were reviewed as well. The purpose of this first investigation was to grasp the officially recognized Islamic view of jinn among Muslim scholars.

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**One of the findings from my study using the STA is that both Islamic and pre-Islamic Bantu cosmologies exist side-by-side without any serious conflict in the Swahili mind. Moreover, Swahili Islam as a localism of Islam is a pragmatic religion. The ordinariness has transformed and amalgamated both Islam and Bantu traditions into a particular type of local Islam.**

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The discoveries from my literary investigation on jinn in Islamic texts provided me with multiple insights into the kind of supernaturalism that both Islamic orthodoxy and pre-Islamic (Bantu) worldview share, particularly in Swahili Islam. In light of the data from studying the literature and from the ethnographic fieldwork, I understood better how Swahili Muslims explain their experiences of jinn. In conducting fieldwork, I also tried to compare Islamic institutional categories with local Swahili uses to detect gaps between Islamic and pre-Islamic assumptions revolving around jinn beliefs and practices in the Swahili context.

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Especially when dealing with spiritual needs, the ordinary mind ceaselessly seeks answers that official Islam cannot provide. The ordinariness borrows, adds, modifies, and synthesizes religious concepts that are deemed helpful to solving their predicaments.

Another example is the study of “folk Islamic cosmology, as seen in Figure 2. I have adopted and modified Paul Hiebert’s model (1994:194) as I wrote an article with John Travis (Kim and Travis 2008:265-278). Through this chart, I attempted to portray a Muslim cosmology: how ordinary Muslims’ eyes perceive the world around them and how their minds understand and interpret it. However, it should be noted that local (cultural) perceptions are presented by using the official Islamic categories. Terms and categories are still presented in the academic (etic) language rather than local ways. Each term and category wait to be filled with local content.<sup>9</sup>

What is important in the chart is that the area and content for the “low Islam (which would include the concept of “folk Islam) is much larger than that for the “high Islam (or “official Islam). Theological categories of high Islam are usually perceived to belong to the other world, not to this world in which ordinary Muslims live. For this reason, the area of high Islam is usually much smaller than that of low Islam.

Cultural contents of all the categories in low Islam are a product that human ordinariness has projected through whatever categories already given by the official Islamic institution. The ordinary mind usually tends to attach traditional meanings creatively to the existing official structure. As a result, Islamic categories do not necessarily carry the same meanings in Muslim minds. Therefore, cultural meanings created and attached by ordinary Muslims can hardly be detected and brought to light through conventional Islamic studies.

Ethnography allows the student of Islamic studies to immerse themselves into a Muslim life situation to collect data that can hardly be obtainable through conventional approaches to Islam. A scrupulously designed ethnographic work can help excavate the cultural meaning and psychology hidden under human ordinariness. In the overall ethnographic work, however, the researcher should keep both the emic data collection and the etic analysis from being too independently carried out outside the official Islamic categories that are the counterpart of folk categories (which reflect ordinariness).<sup>10</sup> Only through this sequential process, as shown in the STA, can the research grasp what characterizes the local Islam under research and see clearly how Muslims in that particular locality experience the world around them. Then, the researcher will propound an argument or theory as to how official Islam has been experienced

9. Local contents are not presented here due to the space limit.

10. This process will need more explanations. The main point is that the researcher should keep vigilant throughout the ethnographic research process to see how Islamic ideas are counteractively or congruently understood, interpreted, and utilized by ordinary local Muslims.

and incorporated into that cultural context.<sup>11</sup>

		Personal Beings		Impersonal Forces	
Unseen or Supernatural Realm	Common Beings based on High Islam	Allah, angels (archangels and many others)	Common Forces based on High Islam	God's absolute power and providence (spirit, the Book (the Qur'an))	Other World
	Other Beings in Low Islam	the prophets (in Paradise), dead saints, ancestors, <i>Jinn</i> (the <i>djinn</i> ), or the <i>Djinn</i> ), all other <i>jinn</i> (many with names), etc.	Local Forces in Low Islam	magic, sorcery, astrological forces (power of astrological time and space), divination, <i>baraka</i> , the merit of <i>shahid</i> , evil eye, evil tongue, curses, talismans, amulets, reading of the Qur'an, drawing of the Qur'anic writings, etc.	This World
Seen or Natural Realm	Social Relations in Low Islam	Muslims (believers and ordinary Muslims), other religious people (Christians, Jews, nonbelievers (Atheists/agnostics), animals, etc.	Natural Science in Low Islam	natural medicines (plants and herbs both from Islamic traditions as in <i>Hikmah</i> and from pre-Islamic local traditions), and other local sciences	

Figure 2. “Framework for the Analyses of Islamic Religious Systems” (Kim and Travis 2008:268)

## ORDINARINESS AND DISCIPLESHIP FOR MUSLIM CONVERTS

Witnessing disciple-making ministries in a cross-cultural context, sometimes I find it difficult to resist a negative impression that some of them give. It is the absence of cultural sensitivity. Cultural insensitivity is often caused by indifference to local culture, if not entire ignorance of it. Some cross-cultural workers often overlook or bypass important local cultural values, especially when overloaded by missionary zeal. Seeking a rapid outcome or pursuing extraordinary results all the time may well result in a serious oversight of the importance of ordinariness in the cross-cultural setting.

According to research by one of my former students, any serious mentoring ministry in a cross-cultural context should aim at mutual growth if the mentor truly expects his/her mentee to grow spiritually. Spiritual maturity can be achieved when both mentor and mentee understand one another in terms of cultural beliefs and values.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, for them to understand each other, both mentor/disciple-maker and mentee/disciple must meet and share at the level of ordinariness, in which people do not need to disguise or pretend.

11. Some excellent pieces of doctoral research have been done in the Islamic studies program that I am currently directing at Africa International University. Among others are Lawrence Oseje (2017), which Langham Foundation published with the book titled African Traditions Meeting Islam (2018), Judy Wang'ombe (2019), and Pauline Mukuria (2021). The researchers used my STA as a fundamental methodological framework, requiring each triangular side to hire a research method(s) suitable to its research question.

12. One of my former students, a Korean missionary involved in a discipleship ministry among university students in Nairobi, did excellent research on mentorship in a cross-cultural context. See Mark Yoon's MTh thesis at Africa International University (2011). Over a decade and a half, he dedicated his life to evangelizing and making disciples at a large university in Nairobi. However, he constantly felt something missing in his ministry. Through a careful study with the STA principle (though his context is not Muslim), he was able to diagnose the missing part and critically analyze the causes of its absence.

At this ordinariness, Jesus Christ met all kinds of people and revealed the Father to them. Although He did not need to grow as we human disciple-makers do, He still came down and stayed at the ordinary level of His disciples and helped them understand the divine truth. To increase the amount of understanding of the long-hidden truth among the disciples who were bound in their cultural upbringings and local worldviews, He always used parables that were comprehensible to anyone in their society when He delivered important messages to people (Mt. 13:34, "In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables."). If one wishes to imitate Jesus' way of making disciples, the attention to human ordinariness should be an important part of his or her discipleship ministry.

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**I was so ignorant and naive, then, of the epistemological process of the human mind and the power of cultural knowledge, let alone anything about Muslim life. My former theological training was designed to deal primarily with doctrinal issues, and my missionary training for years was not very helpful in understanding the life experiences of the Muslims I was sent to serve.**

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Hence, I would like to emphasize that true discipleship should be carried out at the level of ordinariness as the latter is the locus of empowerment. Human ordinariness can be empowered either by the Holy Spirit or the enemy. If Christian discipleship aims at empowering the soul with God's word and helping the disciple to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus in every area of life, the discipleship ministry must seek to transform the soul at the level of ordinariness. A profound spirituality shines in ordinary realms of the disciple's life rather than in his or her outer achievements.

To sum, I emphasize that the concept of ordinariness is significant both in evangelism and discipleship ministries among Muslim converts. I hope that the following story may be conducive to a better understanding of this truth.

In the early 1990s, a young Muslim sheikh (I call him H in this paper) came to the Lord through a local church's ministry in which I was involved in a Muslim-dominant town in northern Kenya. It was a shocking event in the town. I was responsible for looking after him after his conversion. In almost every area of his life, including financial issues, he became dependent on my local church and me. Among many

new life challenges that he began to experience after his conversion was a constant attack from his former Muslim spirit world. He was attacked by a jinni sent by his father, a strong Muslim, almost every night. H tried to describe his painful experiences of the malicious jinni, but I had no idea of his spiritual agonies. His odd stories were utterly confusing to me, and I found myself unable to help him spiritually, only to disappoint his expectation that I would be able to rescue him from his spiritual quandary.

Being a brilliant Muslim teacher with an Islamic college education background, H suffered from the jinn's harassment the same way other ordinary Muslims did. Not understanding Muslims' spiritual experiences, I kept telling him to dismiss such superstitious beliefs because he had already become a Christian. At that time, I believed that his odd ideas would disappear rather automatically only if I kept teaching him Christian doctrines.

I was so ignorant and naive, then, of the epistemological process of the human mind and the power of cultural knowledge, let alone anything about Muslim life. My former theological training was designed to deal primarily with doctrinal issues, and my missionary training for years was not very helpful in understanding the life experiences of the Muslims I was sent to serve. The doctrinal dimension in evangelism and discipleship is important since it has much to do with cognitive persuasion. Certainly, the importance of this intellectual aspect in embracing the gospel cannot be emphasized enough. However, the cognitive comprehension of the gospel needs to be taken to the next step, in which people must believe and experience with their heart what they have come to learn and know intellectually. The dimension of experiencing the gospel in the heart has much to do with human ordinariness.

Human ordinariness is full of weakness, vulnerability, and helplessness, but the heartfelt acceptance of and wholehearted commitment to Jesus occurs at this level of ordinariness. Many Muslim converts testify about their experiences of an extraordinary Jesus in various vulnerable situations. They encounter Jesus when they undergo crises in their mundane life. Discipleship ministry needs to be carried out in people's real life. If we wish to help Muslims come to salvation in Jesus and keep growing in the truth after converting to Christ, we need to appreciate that Muslims are a people of ordinariness just like us.

The realization of my ignorance about Muslim experiences led me to pursue a deeper study on Muslim life, more than studying Islam as a religion. After a few years of further training to learn about Muslims' religio-cultural life both in academic class and in the ministry field, I began to help people like H more effectively as a spiritual mentor. Moreover, I also came to see a great need for revision in the discipline of Islamic studies; Muslims' lived experiences should be included in the discipline as a major category of research. It may be called "Muslim studies, a nuanced

label that indicates a methodological difference from classical approaches. The idea of the STA was thus conceived.

Considering all the issues that I have discussed hitherto, my colleagues and I have launched an Islamic studies track for both MA and Ph.D. in 2004 and 2011 respectively at Africa International University in Nairobi, Kenya.<sup>13</sup> Our programs in Islamic studies aim to have students perform appropriate research based on the STA method to provide more accurate data of the Muslim world and increase the degree of understanding of Muslim life. I pray that both evangelism and discipleship ministry in the Muslim context will be carried out in the spirit of understanding, sympathy, and empathy, based on accurate knowledge of Muslims obtained through scrupulous research using the synthetic triangular approach.

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13. Currently, the program of MA in Intercultural Studies with Islamic Studies emphasis is offered at NEGST (Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology) and the program of Ph.D. in Islamic Studies at CSR (Center for the Study of Religions) of ISAR (Institute for the Study for African Realities) respectively at Africa International University.



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