

Mediator who offers access to God, and he began to read the Bible with new eyes.

Some Muslims seem to follow an intellectual route in which they carefully think through theology, while others appear to come at a spiritual level where God gives supernatural encouragement. God does indeed work in the hearts of Muslims, in spite of the many obstacles put up by Islam, and in spite of the weakness—and often sinfulness—of the gospel messenger.

CHAPTER FOUR

Making Disciples

Peter Zafar wanted to see his family again. Four years earlier, Zafar had made a decision to follow Christ. His wealthy business family in Lahore, Pakistan, had not been able to accept that choice. The family was known for its leadership in the Muslim community, and Zafar himself had been a Muslim teacher with a loyal following. So the family had pressured Zafar to reconsider, then had taken away his considerable inheritance. Zafar had moved to the coastal city of Karachi, where he had found nurture in the Christian faith.

But now some time had passed. Zafar was hoping his family would have come to terms with his conversion. He hoped that his family would receive him again as the eldest son despite their hatred for his faith.

When he returned home to Lahore, he learned his father had died. Nobody had bothered to inform him. Instead of the welcome for which he had hoped, his siblings abused him verbally for leaving Islam. Then they began physically to mishandle him. Finally his younger brother locked him up in a storeroom. Overnight the family would decide what to do with Zafar.

In the middle of the night, a servant who knew Zafar from earlier years took pity on him and unlocked the door of the storeroom. Zafar fled back to Karachi.

When people respond to Christ's gentle invitation to "Come to me," they enter a life of learning from their new Lord. Conversion is the "doorway to discipleship," as Henry Schmidt has so aptly expressed it. Discipleship for converts from Islam generally comes at a cost, such as that paid by Zafar. After conversion there is a lot of work ahead for both disciple and disciplemaker.

Every new Christian needs to find a fresh orientation according to the teachings and example of Christ. This is usually a challenge because

Christ's commandments go against the tendencies of human nature and the old and ingrained patterns of human cultures. When Christ speaks, he speaks from above, and his words are not easily obeyed by us who are from below. An extra difficulty with new Christians from Muslim background can be the need for a change of loyalties. For many Muslims the words and example of The Prophet of Islam—understood as the perfect human—may have held authority before their conversion. Now it is the Lord Jesus who gives the directions for living.

Making disciples in a Muslim context is one of the most exciting and fulfilling life involvements which any Christian can have. In this chapter we will discuss some ways in which the disciplemaker can be helpful to the new convert from Islam. We will also look at a special challenge to discipleship—the suffering which persecution brings.

Helping Young Converts

Jesus said that in addition to bearing witness to him, his followers would make disciples of all people groups. Making disciples would include baptizing those who receive Christ and teaching them to obey everything he had commanded (Matt. 28:19, 20). Jesus instructed his disciples to help new Christians through the first difficult stages of their new life into a developmental phase in which they could stand firm as disciples—and disciplemakers—in their own right. Of course, Jesus provided the model for disciplemaking by concentrating on twelve special followers during his three-year earthly ministry. We also have a helpful picture of disciplemaking in the story of Paul and Timothy. The same sort of caring attention to young Christians is needed in Muslim contexts as well.

Charles Marsh, a British missionary who served in North Africa for forty-five years, found that new converts from Muslim background have much the same needs as the new Christians in Acts who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (2:42). Following a profession of faith in Christ, the disciplemaker should lead the convert in a period of individual instruction in all the fundamental truths of the New Testament. Reading Scripture together is essential, preferably in the colloquial language of the convert.

The disciplemaker, says Marsh, must explain how the aim is not to memorize long sections of Scripture for merit, as the former practice with the Qur’an may have been. Rather, the convert must see the Bible as God’s instructions for how he should live as a Christian. Galatians is an

ideal book for Muslim converts, Marsh found. The new convert must be able to explain his faith to others and to meet their objections from the New Testament (1975:88).

Under New Lordship

An area in which a disciplemaker can greatly help a young convert from Islam is to present Jesus as the new source of authority and as the example for daily behavior. Islam is a very full code of life, and it quite justifiably prides itself on having a law for every daily situation. The Islamic system of law or *Shari’ah* is directly related to the authority of the Prophet of Islam. The Qur’an puts the authority of the Prophet together with that of Allah in the frequent command, “Obey Allah and His apostle.” But beyond the Qur’an is a great deal of material which aims to put forward the sayings and actions of the Prophet of Islam.

His sayings are contained in extensive collections of reports called the *Hadith*. Traditions about the behavior of the Prophet of Islam are called the *Sunnah*. Muslims view these sources as critically important. Sometimes they will describe the extra-Qur’anic sayings and actions of the Prophet of Islam as the “living Qur’an.” “Orthodoxy upholds the primacy of the eternal Qur’an, but the masses have often been devoted to the created Logos, i.e., to Muhammad” (Nazir-Ali 1987:133). It is actually these traditions about the Prophet of Islam which fill out the impressive and comprehensive Islamic system of law for overseeing right conduct.

In “folk” or popular Islam, the role of the Prophet increases on a variable scale of veneration which extends to divinity. When Muslims venerate the Prophet of Islam highly, for example giving him powers of intercession and mediation with Allah, his authority over them becomes more than that of a teacher or prophet. They have pledged their loyalty to him and have in fact made him their Lord.

Disciplemakers can help new converts from Islam through a transfer of lordship. Donald Jacobs, a longtime missionary with the Mennonite Church in East Africa, found that in animist contexts the understanding of power sources is at the very center of the culture. When a person is converted to Jesus Christ, Jacobs asks, what happens at the level of the powers? “I am quite convinced that for a sustained conversion experience a person must elevate Jesus Christ to a position of Lordship in his power constellation and keep him there through Christ-honored living” (Jacobs 1980:136). Jacobs questions whether a commitment to Jesus Christ can last if Christ is thought of as simply equal in power to tradi-

tional powerful spirits and personalities. Jacobs suggests that Christian nurture must help a disciple realize that Jesus is above every other power.

This insight is helpful in Muslim contexts as well, perhaps especially in settings where animistic thinking is also deeply entrenched. The disciplinemaker must present Jesus as the one to whom God the Father has given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (spiritual dimensions of this statement are discussed in chapter 10). In terms of disciplinmaking, Jesus must replace the Prophet of Islam or any local *pir* or *sheikh* as the one who gives the rules for living. Out of his experiences in Muslim village in Sudan, Ken Peters writes, "Jesus Christ must become the great Sheikh of all Muslims, their spiritual guide, their intercessor, and the bestower of God's blessings" (1989:365).

Jesus needs to be Lord for the new Christian in a practical way. His words need to become the new commandments for living. Jesus asked people to listen to and practice his words. He said that people who do this build their lives on a solid foundation. Those who don't take Jesus' words to heart are headed for ruin (Matt. 7:24-27). God the Father drew the disciples' attention to the authority of Jesus at the time of the Transfiguration. "This is my Son, whom I love," he said so that the disciples could never forget. "Listen to him!" (Matt. 17:5). Then, when Jesus parted from his disciples at his Ascension, he said they would teach new followers to obey everything he had commanded.

Disciplinmakers need to keep in mind that Muslims who become Christians may move from a highly structured life of rules into a life that seems to have little structure. Converts may experience a period of confusion. Does Christianity not spell out a way of living? After missionary David Shenk carefully described the Christian ideal for "Right Conduct" in *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue*, his Muslim colleague Badru Kateregga still said, "The Christian Church, unlike the Muslim Umma, has no system of universal law for right conduct" (Katerregga 1997:196).

This is a common Muslim charge. How do we respond? The New Testament does indeed contain a lot of practical teaching on Christian living—in the Gospels as well as in the letters of Paul, Peter, James, and John. Have some disciplinmakers among Muslims tended to neglect this practical material because they want to make sure that the new believer understands her salvation to be based on grace through faith and not on works? The truth is that Jesus gave commandments to his disciples and instructed them to teach these to others as part of their disciplinmaking. There is indeed a "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2; cf. 1 Cor. 9:21). It would be a

mistake to underestimate the attraction of Christ's teachings in the Muslim world.

Muslims often look on the teaching of Christ as a radical alternative to the Islamic system. (Whether they accept or reject such an alternative is quite another matter.) Of particular importance are Christ's teachings on revenge, adultery, divorce, prayer, and fasting, and on the relationship between exterior and interior religion. In these areas the contrast between the Islamic system and the gospel is most clearly seen (Nazir-Ali 1987:36).

Apostasy Brings Suffering

Do we have resources in the history of the church to help us with the challenges of discipleship and disciplinmaking in a context where the convert is severely persecuted?

It is interesting to compare the dangers to Anabaptists in sixteenth-century Europe with the dangers to converts in Muslim contexts today. In sixteenth-century Europe, churches and governments dealt with the beliefs of the Anabaptists by torturing them into recanting. If they refused to recant, they were killed. Hundreds of such stories are recorded in *Martyrs Mirror*. In Islamic law, "there is unanimity that the male apostate must be put to death." Some schools of law allow the woman apostate to be imprisoned until she again adopts Islam, but most schools call for her death as well (Heffening 1993:635).

Though some modernist Muslims argue that this Law of Apostasy is not consistent with their faith (Rahman 1972), most ordinary Muslims believe their faith indeed prescribes the death penalty for leaving Islam. As the popular Muslim writer Maulana Maududi expresses it at the beginning of his book on the punishment of the apostate,

To everyone acquainted with Islamic law it is no secret that according to Islam the punishment for a Muslim who turns to *kufir* (infidelity, blasphemy) is execution. Doubt about this matter first arose among Muslims during the final portion of the nineteenth century as a result of speculation. Otherwise, for the full twelve centuries before that time the total Muslim community remained unanimous about it. (Maudidi 1994:17)

Samuel Zwemer felt this was one explanation for the low number of conversions from Islam to Christ in the Middle East (1924). In any case, it puts the cost of discipleship for Muslims far higher than the cost for converts from many other backgrounds. And it explains why discip-

making in this context will generally be more intensive than in other settings.

Some Christian workers from the West counsel that we must not look for a level of commitment which will bring the convert unnecessary suffering. It is true that outside workers must not insist on cultural changes not specified in Scripture. Also, outside workers must not require of converts suffering which they themselves are not willing to accept as well. But disciplinakers have no right to soft-peddle discipleship. They stand under the authority of the One who commanded them to make disciples.

Jesus told those who would follow him that they must take up their cross. He did not promise a life free of suffering—quite the contrary! The early Anabaptists accepted that their commitment to Christ would bring painful, and even deadly, consequences. Though they knew that adult baptism would bring them into conflict with the religious and political authorities of their society, they went ahead with baptism as a step of obedience and defended their action from Scripture with a commitment which confounded their interrogators. These stories of martyr witness from the past can shed light on modern discussions of what to look for in the lives of converts.

Cost of Disciplemaking

However, the Anabaptist heritage also contains instruction on the commitment of the disciplinaker. The step which the Anabaptist leader Menno Simons considered his conversion was the commitment to pastor the scattered and persecuted Anabaptists of Holland and northern Germany. His decision to encourage and instruct—to *disciple*—these hapless believers meant a readiness to die at any moment. Thereafter, the authorities were continually on his trail, and indeed there was a price on his head.

It is reported that some who showed hospitality to Menno were executed a short time after his departure—simply for hosting him. God kept Menno safe during his long and fruitful ministry, but as a disciplinaker he had put himself in the same danger that his flock was in. Is the disciplinaker among Muslim converts prepared to endure the same kind of suffering which the converts themselves suffer?

John Mahamah, a Muslim convert from Ghana who has pastored churches made up mostly of converts from Islam, says that the Muslim convert churches he knows which are strong and growing are the ones in which the leaders are willing to suffer along with the members.

In some settings, disciplinakers, especially those from developed countries, will have to struggle with various financial questions as well. When converts lose their normal ways of livelihood, they may need to rely more heavily on the disciplinaker for financial help or advice, or indeed for shelter or food. This is not an easy burden for the disciplinaker to bear.

Commitment to People

One of the most satisfying experiences of MBMS International ministry in Karachi, Pakistan, during the early 1990s was helping disciple a number of new Christians from Muslim background. Peter Zafar and Hashim Peter had come to Christ through the witness of other Christians, and they attended worship services at a Church of Pakistan congregation. But fellow worker Tim Bergdahl and I had the privilege of getting to know them well and helping them along in their faith. Both Zafar and Hashim (their respective birth names and thus used from this point forward) had suffered rejection by their families and communities when they committed themselves to Christ. Hashim had kept his family together even though his wife did not join him in coming to Christ.

On the other hand, many in the Pakistani Christian community treated these converts with suspicion. It seemed to me that the two men were not enjoying the level of fellowship they needed. One day Zafar said to me, "What I would like is to be part of a fellowship group in which we celebrate each other's birthdays." That comment struck me, and I made up my mind that with God's help I was going to create a fellowship group around Zafar.

We arranged to meet one evening each week at Zafar's small apartment. We sat on the floor for Bible study and prayer. An important part of our meeting was eating together. Eating together has a special significance in Eastern cultures. And the converts and other Christians in our group had sometimes experienced the insult of Muslims refusing to eat with them because they were Christians. Hashim was part of the group from the start. Other friends of Zafar, converts or Pakistani Christians with a love for Muslims, joined the group. Sometimes Muslims came to visit as well. The Bible study and prayer took on a special quality as we opened our lives to each other.

One member of the group was a German man who had come to Pakistan to smoke hashish and had become involved in Sufi Islam. Over time he had burned all his bridges. Now he wanted to rejoin his family in Germany and was looking for help from the church. Hartmut brought a

lot of problems and a broken heart into the group, but the others embraced him in a remarkable way. Hashim would sometimes burst into tears as Hartmut was relating his woes.

Hashim's response to Spirit-led discipling was the most instructive for me. He would come to the meeting regularly and gladly but always with cares from trying to make a living in a difficult city. Almost every week he would bring a story of the cost he was paying at his workplace and in his family for his commitment to Christ, though he never complained. We would then eat together, study God's Word, tell our needs to each other, pray together, and sometimes sing worship songs.

At some point during the study, almost without fail, Hashim would let out a big sigh and say "Thank you, Jesus." You knew then that something from the Spirit of God had gotten through to encourage his heart. The same kind of encouragement does not come in a normal worship service. There needs to be deeper contact, a more intimate fellowship, to give converts strength to face their special challenges.

One of the creative activities we did together was to attend a Muslim meeting at a well-known mosque on a Thursday evening. The meeting was open to non-Muslims because this mosque was part of the missionary *Tablighi Jamaat* organization. Listening to the presentation and conversing with Muslim religious leaders later gave us a way of participating in an important part of Hashim's and Zafar's identity. It also gave us a way of making an open gospel witness in the hearing of the young believers.

A crisis came to our group when a popular Muslim magazine decided to print articles on the evangelistic work of our Church of Pakistan congregation. Both Hashim and Zafar were prominently featured in the coverage and labeled "apostates." The day after Hashim's photo was published in the magazine, he went to his teaching job as usual. The principal of the school said there was no alternative but to take Hashim's job away.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gathering Believers Together

Masood was attracted by the sound of singing. He walked toward the house from where the sound came and found a door wide open. Inside he saw about twenty men, women, and children singing a song about Jesus. One man sat in front of them, holding a book Masood recognized as the Bible.

Several people turned toward Masood and smiled. They beckoned him to come in, bending their fingers downward as people do in Pakistan. These Christians, from low-caste Hindu background, were despised by the Muslims of Masood's Ahmadi community of Rabwah. But Masood felt strangely comfortable among them.

After worship, the man with the Bible asked Masood to introduce himself. Somebody brought him a cup of sweet, milky tea. Sitting on the *charpai* (rope bed) beside the pastor, Masood asked how he could get a copy of the Bible. He asked why Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The pastor gave him simple, gentle answers. The tea tasted good. This was Masood's first experience of the church (Masood 1986:44-46).

The church in Muslim contexts needs to be a new family for young converts from Islam. When Muslims become followers of Jesus, they become members of a worldwide multiethnic, transnational fellowship. Converts need the support of a community of believers who share their commitment to Jesus Christ. The challenge for Christian workers is to gather individual believers together for mutual support and accountability. The needs of Christian nurture in the Muslim context draw out all the best that the church now is—as well as what God wants it yet to be.