

**VOICES FROM CHRISTIANS IN BRITAIN WITH A MUSLIM BACKGROUND:
STORIES FOR THE BRITISH CHURCH ON EVANGELISM, CONVERSION,
INTEGRATION AND DISCIPLESHIP**

By

Thomas J. Walsh

A Dissertation

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
For the degree**

MA in Mission

**Birmingham Christian College
Birmingham, England
September 2005**

I dedicate this work to Martin my friend

And all my Navigator colleagues

To advance the gospel of Jesus and his kingdom

Into the nations

Through spiritual generations of labourers

Living and discipling among the lost

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to a large number of people who have to put up with me but who make my life more enjoyable than they can imagine.

In some cases they have just kept me going

The Sanctuary Team and the Koinonia Group.....thanks for the partnership

Our Small Group.....whose commitment to Judi and I amazes us

Allan, Cathie, Peter, Gillian and Judy.....special Navigator colleagues and friends who have shared our exile in Birmingham, a great city

John and Catherine.....always an inspiration

Nasrine....our closest, best and dearest Muslim friend

Staff at BCC and especially Mark.....who showed me what good criticism really is

The MBBs who took part in this research.....special people indeed

Our faithful and loyal financial supporters....thank you so much

My family especially Andy and Dave.....always great to see you

Janet.....our special friend

And finally Judi.....words are insufficient

CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	1
DEDICATION	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
CHAPTER 1 THE IDEA OF VOICES	5
CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE BACKGROUND	8
A. Methodology	8
B. Sample Background	12
CHAPTER 3 THE STORIES OF EVANGELISM AND CONVERSION	18
A. How the MBBs heard the gospel message	18
B. How the MBBs and their families reacted to conversion	33
CHAPTER 4 THE STORIES OF INTEGRATION AND DISCIPLESHIP	41
A. How the MBBs were received by the British Church	41
B. How the MBBs were discipled	51
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS	58
A. How the MBBs now see Islam	58
B. Challenges for the British Church	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY	69
APPENDIX 1	73

Chapter 1

The Idea of Voices

“Why the interest in a piece of work on Muslim Christian relations?” asked a friend. Several reasons surfaced quickly. First is the current international climate which sets Islam against the West. The last fifteen years have witnessed two Iraq wars; the destruction of the World Trade Centre, the War on Terror, ongoing conflict in the Middle East and most recently the London bombings. Fear once associated with Communism and Fascism is now linked to Islam. A resurgent, confident and radical Islam appears rampant; “a rumbling volcano”¹ as one author called it. Islam is centre stage in world affairs.

Second Muslims are now living in Britain in significant numbers. The UK 2001 Census recorded 1.6 million Muslim people, just below 3% of the total population. Islam is the most common religion after Christianity. In large urban centres this % figure is much higher, so London’s Muslim population of 607,083 is 8.5% of the capital’s total and Birmingham’s 140,033 is 14.3% of its population. Today one does not have to travel abroad to meet Muslims. Muslims are neighbours and work colleagues. The author has lived for seventeen years in a ward which has over 70% minority ethnic population. The majority of these people are Muslims. The figures will continue to rise. Islam’s voice in Britain is growing.

Third, despite great missionary movements and evangelistic enterprises, few Muslims become Christians. As Riddell and Cotterell explain;

“In general it seems that the closer any religion is to Christianity, the less likely it is that members of that religion will convert. Followers of the Traditional Religions (which have little in common with Christianity) have often forsaken them in large numbers, in favour of Christianity, while converts from Islam and

¹ Nabeel Jabbour: *The Rumbling Volcano - Islamic Fundamentalism in Egypt*

Judaism (both of which have close ties to Christianity) have generally been few.”²

Not only this, evidence today suggests that Islam is attracting westerners, gaining recruits and winning converts. Na’ima Robert’s book *From My Sister’s Lips* celebrates her own conversion to Islam and the community of women she has grown to know all of whom have chosen the path of Islam. Islam is not simply resistant to Christianity but an alternative to it.

Fourth the author knew Christians living in Britain who had been brought up as Muslims. Conversion to Christianity from Islam was possible. This generated more questions. How was this happening? What were the factors involved? What were the consequences for the individuals and their families? What happened after conversion? How did the Church respond? Were the new believers welcomed and integrated? How were they disciplined? The author was keen to discover from the lips of those who had been Muslims, but were now confessing Christians, their own stories. Theirs were voices which would be interesting to hear. They would have something to say that might influence both society and Church.

The focus of the research, therefore, became the story of the individuals who agreed to participate. Their journey, a process, became central. The aim was to listen to these voices and relate them as fairly as possible. They would have lessons which could influence the church, their church. The themes of evangelism, conversion, integration and discipleship followed naturally because these words summarise the process an individual goes through in first hearing about Christ, growing in knowledge and understanding of him, responding in faith, joining his family, the Church, and growing in their love, commitment and service to him.

The significance of this piece of research is that very little has been done in this area in Britain. Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) are still rare. There is a great deal of

² Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell: *Islam in Conflict* p121

literature on Islam. Much of it is educational³, historical and political⁴ or missiological⁵. Because converts have been few emphases is given to evangelistic⁶ strategies and methodologies. The differences between Islam and Christianity are debated in apologetic literature⁷. By contrast some literature⁸ is more sensitively written by those who know Islam well, and love Muslim people. Testimonies and stories of conversion do exist⁹. There is an assumption, held by some Church leaders that the British Church is accessible to converts from Islam, but the wider society is less sure of the role and place of these relatively new incomers¹⁰.

What did the MBBs themselves have to say? It was their voices that the author set out to hear. There were limitations. The source material is “soft qualitative”¹¹ as Seppo Syrjanen explains. The insider’s view has to be relied upon. Sampling is haphazard. The original experience and meaning may be revised, reinterpreted and even fabricated. “Religion experienced is different from religion remembered.”¹² Syrjanen makes it clear that there is no intention to slur the person. However their present reality may be used to bear out past events. The author is aware of this limitation. Nevertheless as Syrjanen himself argues there can be a degree of trust if memory and experience are both a good fit. “Some truth”¹³ will exist in this context. The methodology and sampling will now be looked at in greater depth.

³ For example Jacques Jomier: *How to Understand Islam*

⁴ For example Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell: *Islam in Conflict*

⁵ For example chapters 94 to 99 in Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne: *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*

⁶ For example Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq: *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim*

⁷ For example F.S. Copleston: *Christ or Mohammed? The Bible or The Koran?*

⁸ For example Anne Cooper: *Ishmael My Brother*

⁹ For example Steven Masood: *Into the Light – A Young Muslim’s Search for Truth.*

¹⁰ For example Roger Hooker and Christopher Lamb: *Love The Stranger*

¹¹ Seppo Syrjanen: *In Search of Meaning and Identity* p80

¹² *Ibid* p83

¹³ *Ibid* p86

Chapter 2

Methodology and Sample Background

A. Methodology

The aim of this dissertation is to look in detail at stories of Muslims in Britain who have converted to Christianity; to analyse the factors involved in the Muslim Background Believer's (MBBs) conversion; to chart their journeys into the Christian community, and examine how they were helped or hindered in becoming effective disciples of Jesus Christ; to evaluate their present view of the Church, based on their own experiences; to describe how they see themselves now and in particular how they continue to relate to Islam and their own cultural roots.

Sixteen MBBs took part in this research. The author wanted to interview as many as he could. However there were constraints. First he wanted to focus on those people that he knew personally. A sensitive work of this type could easily go wrong. He wanted to have confidence in those he interviewed. He did not want to misunderstand what they were saying. MBBs that he knew and trusted would be the most reliable. He did not want people giving him perceived right answers. Ten of his respondents fitted this profile. To broaden the survey he took suggestions from close friends of others who fitted his criterion. Six MBBs were subsequently added.

Second he wanted people born in Britain, or those who had lived there long. This was because the research concerned Britain. Asylum seekers, MBBs on student visas, or those recently arrived in Britain were excluded¹⁴. Eight of those invited were born and raised in Britain. The others arrived as young children or adults through the last three decades of the twentieth century.¹⁵ All sixteen MBBs fitted this criterion.

¹⁴ The author knew people in each of these three categories, but chose not to invite them to take part.

¹⁵ Although some immigration took place to Britain before, it was not until the ending of the Second World War in 1945 that major immigration began. With a highly depleted work force, and in desperate need of rebuilding her economy and restoring production levels, Britain opened her doors to the people of the British Commonwealth. Recruiting drives were sent to former colonies, which had helped her through the

Third the author wanted to have mature and stable MBBs, rather than immature and unstable ones. For spiritual growth to happen time was needed. Thus new and young Christians were excluded as were children. All sixteen participants fitted this criterion.¹⁶

Finally the author wanted to include people who were taking some leadership responsibility in their local fellowship, mission agency or Christian community. This not only verified and authenticated their credentials, but also meant those interviewed had vested interests in the outcome of the research. The conclusions might help them in their work and ministry. All sixteen, with the exception of Tony, fitted this criterion¹⁷.

A questionnaire was sent in advance to the sixteen participants. Details of ethnicity, age, gender, marital status and length of Christian experience were taken. Their stories were recorded with the help of open-ended questions. The author wanted to allow the interviewees as much freedom as possible to relate and reflect upon their experiences in words which they chose. There were three main sections. The first related to evangelism and conversion. This was their story up to and including their decision to follow Jesus Christ. The second section related to integration and discipleship in the Church. This was what happened to them after conversion. A final section asked them to reflect on

war effort. At first in the late 1940s and through the 1950s it was from the West Indies that most people came. These people shared a Christian religious worldview. South Asians began to come in the late 1950s, from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It was more likely that these recruits would see the world through Hindu, Sikh or Muslim eyes. At first only the men would arrive, leaving their spouse and family at home. Once settled and established, in the late 1960s, they began to send for their wives and children. A further complicating trend happened in the early 1970s. A large number of East African Asians, people who had originated from South Asia, but who were used by the British in her East African colonies from the early 20th century, and who were now resented by their black neighbours were forced to flee. Thus it was for example that President Idi Amin of Uganda ordered the expulsion of over 27,000 Asians, in 1972, almost overnight. With British passports many of these came to Britain. The experience, if a little less traumatic, also happened to many people of South Asian origin in Kenya and Tanzania. Whilst the majority of this upwardly mobile community is Hindu, approximately 30% of these coming from East Africa have a Shia Muslim background.

¹⁶ Titus, the youngest at four years old, is already at theological college, and plans to become a Minister.

¹⁷ Tony took responsibility whilst among Christians at university but has now returned to his hometown. Although a follower of Jesus for ten years, he has not yet told his family. This prevents him presently from taking an active, regular part in Church leadership, though the author met him at a social event for Christians.

Islam, their own family and cultural roots in the light of their experience as a Christian. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix 1.

Thirteen responded to the questionnaire and returned it to the author before he met them. This allowed for the information to be digested. Two interviews were conducted face to face, when the MBBs were met. In one case, Paul, the interview took place using a telephone, the author having met him previously, discussing matters related to Christian Muslim relationships.

An extended interview allowed a full exploration of the answers in the questionnaire. Details were clarified and expanded. The author took notes as the interviewees spoke. Two people suggested that the interview was taped. Taping had not been considered by the author at the inception of the research, and with hindsight was worth considering. However it is his contention that to have done so might have inhibited some of those he interviewed, and might have proved technically awkward. On average the interview took 2.5 hours. No person was interviewed for less than two hours. In some cases the interview lasted for over three hours. There was flexibility in the sequence of the questions in order to accommodate the flow of the interviewees' stories.

The stories are unique and the author wanted to give each one the fullest expression. He felt at liberty to pursue those parts of the interviewee's journey which appeared most significant. The interviews allowed clarification and the pursuit of particular points. This gave the focus in some cases to the evangelism process. In others the point of conversion seemed more significant in terms of principles learned or phenomena observed. Particular note was taken of the post conversion experience. This was because little has been written, in the context of Britain, charting a growing relationship with Jesus Christ in the life of an MBB. There appears to be an assumption among missionaries, practitioners and writers that the end goal is conversion. The author was keen to discover those principles of development which allowed for the MBBs to take a full, active part in the local Church, and enabled them to go on to take leadership responsibilities within their fellowships. The post conversion period is crucial to this research.

Between the initial contact, completion of the questionnaire and the final extended interview anything from a few weeks to a few months elapsed. The interviews were done in a period from December 2004 to June 2005. Skills involved listening, recording, questioning, exploring, interpreting and reflecting upon their stories. The author experienced few problems carrying out this research. The participants having agreed were faithful in completing the questionnaire, met with the author at suitable times, and were open to relate their stories in detail. Towns and cities visited included London where three people were met, Liverpool, Nottingham, Derby, Walsall and Halesowen where an interview was conducted in each place. The other eight interviews took place in Birmingham. The author resisted the temptation to quote from individuals whom he had not met and interviewed. Sources like Steven Masood, who has written his testimony¹⁸, but whom the author had no personal access to were not included.

The sample size of sixteen is small and the author questioned the validity of the results. Were they reliable? Could or should more MBBs be interviewed? These questions remain legitimate; a larger sample size would be desirable. Nevertheless the author feels that as his criterion was met by the respondents, that care and consistency was taken in the interview stage, and that detailed, subtle and sophisticated answers were given, there can be some confidence in the results. Whilst each story is unique, sufficient overlaps exist for general conclusions to be made. Because conversions from a Muslim background remain small, the fact that sixteen were willing to be interviewed at length was a satisfactory outcome.

Because the reaction of Muslim family, friends and community can be negative, pseudonyms have been used throughout this work to protect the identity of those questioned. The author has also been discreet in linking the respondents to particular cities or towns in order to ensure anonymity.

¹⁸ See Steven Masood: *Into the Light – A Young Muslim’s Search for Truth*.

B. Sample Background

Table 1 – MBB Background Information

Name	Age	Sex	M/S	Ethnicity	Muslim	Christian
Abraham	>50	M	M	Bangladeshi	Sunni	28
Andrew	30-50	M	M2	Mirpuri	Sunni	7
Barnabas	30-50	M	M	Mirpuri	Sunni	10
Deborah	30-50	F	M	Iranian	Shia	24
Esther	30-50	F	M	Mixed	Sunni	21
John	>50	M	W	Indian	Shia	35
Josephine	30-50	F	S	Mirpuri	Sunni	24
Judah	30-50	M	S	East African	Shia	19
Lydia	30-50	F	S	Punjabi	Shia	18
Mary	30-50	F	S	Bangladeshi	Sunni	8
Paul	30-50	M	S	Punjabi	Sunni	22
Rebekeh	30-50	F	M	Punjabi	Sunni	17
Ruth	<30	F	M	Punjabi	Sunni	17
Sarah	30-50	F	M	East African	Shia	33
Titus	30-50	M	M	Mixed	Sunni	4
Tony	30-50	M	S	Bangladeshi	Shia	10

Key

Name	= Pseudonyms used throughout the study
Age	= in years
Sex	= M-Male F-Female
M/S	= M-Married S-Single W-Widower M2-Married twice
Ethnicity	= Mirpur and Punjab both inside Pakistan
Titus	= Mixed German mother and Egyptian father
Esther	= Mixed Punjabi mother and Indian father
Muslim	= Muslim Background
Christian	= How long they have been Christians - in years.

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the background of the respondents. It was endeavoured to provide as balanced and varied a sample as possible.

Table 2 – MBB Background Information

Name	Born	Arrived	Christian	Church/Christian Responsibilities
Abraham	-----	1974	1977	Bible College training Home Group Leader
Andrew	1970s	-----	1998	Influential member of Church Plant Bible Study Group Leader Member of Church Planting Team
Barnabas	-----	1970	1995	Influential member of Community Church Home group Leader Theology Degree
Deborah	-----	1979	1981	Influential member of New Church Influential member of New Frontiers Church Leader of Iranian Fellowship
Esther	1968	-----	1984	Worship Leader Influential member of Pentecostal Church Social worker in Asian women projects
John	-----	1969	1970	Influential member of CE Parish Church Bible College training Member of Voluntary Missionary Society Missionary in Middle East and South Asia Tentmaker / Teacher
Josephine	1961	1960s	1981	Development Officer for Christian Agency Influential member of local Church
Judah	1967	1970s	1985	Member of Church Leadership team Street evangelist Preacher / Trainer
Lydia	1968	-----	1987	Youth Worker Home Group Leader Worship Leader PCC Member
Mary	-----	1978	1997	Evangelist Influential member of Asian fellowship
Paul	-----	1997	1983	Theologically trained Member of Voluntary Missionary Society Leader “Fellowship of Believers”
Rebekeh	1968	-----	1988	Influential member of Asian fellowship Influential member of CE Parish Church Manager of Asian women’s refuge
Ruth	1976	-----	1988	Youth Group leader Member Bible Study group Theological training Member Voluntary Missionary Society Teacher / TEFL trained
Sarah	-----	1965	1972	In process Missionary to Middle East Sunday School teacher Influential member of Church plant
Titus	-----	1983	2001	Home group host Volunteer Church coffee shop Outreach and evangelism volunteer Bible College training
Tony	1979	1981	1995	In process Ministerial training University CU Treasurer

Key

Name	= Pseudonyms used throughout the study
Born	= Indicates birth in Britain
Arrived	= Indicates arrival date to Britain
Christian	= How long they have been Christians - in years.

Children were discounted from the study. This would have been difficult to manage, and potentially dangerous for any wishing to be interviewed. A mature, stable Christian is rarely a child. Fifteen respondents were over thirty years of age. The average length of time which these individuals had been Christians was eighteen years. Table 2 shows what responsibilities they were now taking in the wider Christian community. Stability and long term commitment might point to the fact that they have been integrated and disciplined well. Alternatively it might just show that they have survived well. Regardless, any criticism, positive or negative, comes with greater weight. The fact that they have been Christians for a long time does indicate that many of them did become Christians when they were young and this phenomenon will be explored later. The chart also shows when they were born or when they arrived in Britain, as well as the date that they became Christians.

In terms of gender, there are eight people from each sex. This is pleasing statistically, and might indicate greater freedom which women find in British society¹⁹. The balance managed in this study is welcome; as in the area of marital status. Nine of those questionnaired were married. In one case this was a second marriage, as Andrew's first wife had died. John was a widower. What was very striking was that of eleven marriages in total eight were with white western Christians. Two people interviewed

¹⁹ Seppo Syrjänen doing a similar piece of research in Pakistan over 20 years ago published as *In Search of Meaning and Identity* had very few women interviewees. Des Harper commenting on this in *Why South Asians in Britain Come to Christ: Factors in the Conversion to Christ of People of Other Faiths* states; "It is worth mentioning that data appears to be more limited on females, especially Muslims, in other studies. Syrjänen's study included two women among thirty-six subjects, and the ratio of male to female testimonies in other publications studied was about 6 to 1. Rambo says that "there are very few studies of women's conversion experiences to offset the assumed generic (but almost always male) research to date"". p58

were married to each other, Abraham and Sarah, but this was also cross-cultural being East African Asian with Bangladeshi spouse. They were the only MBBs married to one another. Esther was married to a Hindu background Christian. Thus all eleven marriages were cross cultural in nature.

This raises a number of questions. Does the paucity of converts from people of Muslim origin mean that those who do convert will inevitably have to find a partner from a different ethnicity? To what degree is the stability of these people an indication of the support they have received from their spouses? To what degree is the spouse a help to the MBB joining the Church? Because the author had not anticipated this finding, no subsidiary questions were planned in the extended interview. More research would be valuable here.

Six of the interviewees were single. As all of these people were over thirty years of age, this presented problems for them socially with their families²⁰. It was mentioned several times that marriage marked a major cut off point. Once married to Christians from a different ethnic background, families tended to accept the fact that their children were no longer Muslims. Judah in particular felt his relationship with his family would be enhanced once he got married. Whilst the six who were unmarried had problems of status associated with this, they nevertheless pursued careers in keeping with their peers anywhere in Britain.

The ethnic background of those interviewed was diverse, but the majority, fourteen, were South Asian²¹ in origin. Seven of those I interviewed had Pakistani roots. Four of these

²⁰ Arranged marriages are still common within the South Asian and Muslim communities. Judah explained that in his case it would have been normal for his family to have arranged his marriage. Becoming a Christian therefore presents a huge stumbling block, as the MBBs themselves want a spouse who shares their new faith. This is the last thing on the minds of their Muslim parents or elders. Once married the status of the child rises in the minds of his or her family.

²¹ South Asia is a mass of ethnic groups. When British India was granted independence and partitioned in 1947, two new nation states were established, India and Pakistan. Pakistan itself was divided between West and East. These two countries were established to protect the majority Muslim populations in these areas, and remain predominantly Muslim today. Later conflict between West and East Pakistan gave the latter its own independence and the country of Bangladesh was born in 1967.

came from the Punjab²² and three from Mirpur²³. It was a disappointment to the author to exclude from interview people whose family origins lay in different parts of Pakistan most notably Pathans from the North West Frontier Province²⁴.

Three of the respondents came originally from Bangladesh. India although religiously and culturally diverse is seen as a Hindu country despite its secular democratic institutions. One of the respondents, John, stated he was Indian. Two East African Asians, Judah and Sarah, had family origins in Gujerat, Northwest India²⁵.

Deborah was Iranian. Many Iranians, disillusioned with Islam following the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, are becoming Christians today throughout the world. Strong Iranian fellowships exist in Liverpool, London and Birmingham to name just three cities. The temptation to visit and interview these people was resisted. In many cases

²² The Punjab is the most economically prosperous part of Pakistan. This area is interesting because between the period 1873 and 1930 mass movements of the lowest castes, the untouchables or Chuhras became Christians. Syrjanen comments in, *In Search of Meaning and Identity*, that they "...sought a way out of their socially depressed and defiled status by affiliating themselves with the religious institutions of their colonial rulers, the British.... In great numbers...asked to be baptised. After some hesitation...and despite the warnings of other missionaries that a great influx...would prevent higher castes and groups even to consider doing the same, these people were accepted." p108. Most of the South Asian Christians living in Britain come from these roots, the Punjab, and have had several generations of Christian experience. Their origin, status and influence have resulted in Muslims, who see themselves as socially superior, rejecting the Christian message.

²³ To the north and east of the Punjab lies the disputed region of Kashmir. At the time of independence this region although dominated by a Muslim population came under the jurisdiction of India. The area has known little peace since. Here the border between India and Pakistan is indistinct and disputed. There is the presence of official armies and guerrilla fighters alike. Two areas are recognised. Jammu Kashmir is that part occupied by India. By contrast Azad Kashmir is within Pakistani control and means Free Kashmir. One female respondent, Josephine, actually placed her ethnic background as Azad Kashmiri. In practice this meant a small area in the south of this region called Mirpur. Three of my interviewees came from Mirpur. It is a rural area. Large populations of Mirpuri people came to Britain in the late 1960s and 70s, as a result of the construction of the Mangla Dam. This earth structure held back an enormous man made lake. Villages and towns were flooded and destroyed, and with the compensation received from the Government large numbers began to flood into Britain. Josephine's family arrived in Britain in the 1960s. Barnabas himself arrived in 1970. Today large concentrations of people from Mirpur are found in East London, parts of Birmingham and Bradford, and people from Mirpur constitute about three-quarters of the total Pakistani population living in Britain.

²⁴ Two Pathans were known to the author. However both were disqualified based on the criteria. One had most of his Christian experience in Pakistan itself, and is only here on a student visa. The other was not considered to be mature enough to qualify. They thus fell outside of the remit of this study.

²⁵ This is because in the early part of the 20th Century the British took a large number of these people to Africa to act at an administrative level between the colonial rulers, and their black subjects. The Muslims in Gujerat have Shia backgrounds with strong ancestral links back to Yemen.

they are still young believers. Deborah, known personally for a few years has been a Christian for twenty four years and now leads the team in one of these fellowships. Deborah and Titus provided change from the South Asian ethnic dominance, but the author is aware that any conclusions regarding Middle Eastern Muslims living in Britain must be very tentative. Two of those interviewed, Titus and Esther had mixed race parentage.

Although Muslims regard their religion as universally united the reality is different. Sunnis form approximately 90% of the Muslim world, and Shias the remaining 10%. The schism is caused by politics, namely who should rule the Muslim people²⁶. It was pleasing to have representatives from both Sunni and Shia background if not exactly in the same proportion to their international balance.

To summarise a balanced sample of sixteen MBBs participated in this research. They were diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, marital status, gender and Christian experience. The criteria the author set: a British focus, mature Christians, each taking some leadership responsibility was also met.

²⁶ Sunnis maintain that command must lie with a descendant from Mohammed's own tribe, the Quraysh. By contrast Shias believe that only a direct descendent of Mohammed himself can rule the brotherhood.

Chapter 3

The Stories of Evangelism and Conversion

A. How the MBBs heard the gospel message

Three questions related to the period before the respondents made a decision to follow Jesus. At this stage the person was known as a Muslim. Over a period of time, regardless of antipathy, neutrality or enthusiasm toward Christianity, events, conversations or people came into their lives, which began the process which ultimately led them to follow Jesus Christ. It is these stories that will now be captured. The specific questions in the questionnaire were; Jot down the main points and defining moments up to the point of decision. How long would you say this process took? What three factors most strongly influenced your decision to follow Jesus?

Thirteen people reported that there was a personal search, questions or problems that they experienced. In some cases a trauma in their life started the process. Paul suffered a serious motor bike accident, and became depressed and suicidal. Judah experienced nightmares as a young child. For others it was a lack of peace. Josephine reported that conviction of her own sin and her inability to change was troubling her. Life after death and the uncertainty of a clear answer in Islam influenced some. The burning question in Ruth's life was, "If you are real Jesus I want to know how I can be close to you." It was to her neighbour that Ruth turned, several times hearing her testimony. One year later at twelve Ruth invited Jesus into her life. To her it was a clear if private decision. Lydia was questioning the whole purpose of life from twelve through to sixteen. Although she looked into all sorts of religions she could not find the answer to the question, "If I die tomorrow what will happen to me?" Deborah struggled in her relationship with her mother. She remembers vividly asking God in a real and honest way to help her. She said, "I asked God to somehow rescue me from the hopelessness of my own life. I was very anxious and fearful." At twenty and with family problems John left India and travelled through Iraq, Dubai and finally into Germany. His Middle Eastern experience

left him with some doubts about Islam. Mary too was “confused about Islam.” Tony’s new friend intrigued him as she spoke so personally about her faith. Soon after Andrew married, his wife developed cancer. It was during this time of distress that the couple looked seriously into Christianity. Both became Christians, though his wife sadly died one year later. For Andrew, with his legal training, it was the rational, empirical evidence about Christ that seemed convincing. One of the questions that had previously disturbed Abraham was when Magnus Magnusson presented a BBC television programme entitled “In the Footsteps of Abraham.” To his astonishment Mecca was not even mentioned in the programme. This triggered questions in his mind. Sarah’s questions rose when she observed the life of the Christian family she stayed with in holiday times. “What’s the difference?” she kept asking herself, and this brought confusion. This went on for several years. At fifteen she asked God in sincerity to show her the right way. Rebekeh too questioned the role of Islam in her life.

Thirteen people reported that having Christian friends was important to them. These friends might be older or peers. Ruth was the only person under thirty I interviewed. Her family had Sikh neighbours. When Ruth was eleven one of these ladies, in her late 20s made it clear to Ruth that she was in fact a Christian. She spontaneously spoke about Jesus. She also organised some events for the children in the area to go to, including having a small club in her home. This friendship was critical to Ruth becoming a Christian. A friend invited Andrew and his first wife to an Alpha Course, as did a Muslim friend, now a Christian, who explained to Lydia about her own visit to a Christian meeting. Here she had been presented with the gospel and in Lydia’s words, “the truth about forgiveness of sins and that salvation came through Christ not good works or earned in any way.” From seventeen Lydia began wrestling with Christianity, culminating in her decision to follow Christ at nineteen. The thing that meant most to Lydia and her friend was the thought that Asians could become followers of Christ. Of the three things to influence her decision this friend came first for Lydia. At the age of twelve, Mary remembers, a dinner lady began to tell the children stories of Jesus over their lunch break. Later at university, Mary met a Messianic Jew. This person gave Mary a Bible, but also showed a great deal of interest in her culture. Although leaving

university meant they went their separate ways both kept in touch and when Mary's mum had cancer she asked this friend to pray. When her best friend became a Christian at university Rebekeh noticed a change in him. Most of Titus' friends at university were Christians. By contrast Tony's journey took just under one year from the moment he met a girl at Sixth Form College. "There was something different about her," he stated. She explained that she was a Christian, and that she loved Jesus. Throughout his childhood no one had ever spoken so personally about his or her faith. He was intrigued.

These Christian friends might be relatives. Josephine's older sister was a follower of Christ before she was. Over eight years and mainly influenced by her, Josephine grew in her Christian understanding. The change she observed in her sister's life and subsequent witness was decisive. Esther was born in Britain and became Christ's when she was sixteen years old. Her mother had a Punjabi Christian background. Her father was a Muslim, having reverted back to this after claiming he was a Christian for ten years. The family had come to Britain in the 1960s. Despite his devotion to Islam including regular trips to Mecca, it was her mother's gentler influence, which held sway. "She practised what she preached," said Esther. Paul's brother played a significant part in his conversion after his motor bike accident.

These friendships might be in the form of a Christian family. Deborah stayed with such a family over the Christmas vacation from boarding school. She went with them to a carol service. Here she heard the gospel for the first time. She continued relating to this family and on Easter Sunday, four months later, became a Christian. She is now married to a family member. Of East African Asian ethnicity Sarah came to Britain for schooling in 1965 when eight years old. She too attended a Boarding School, and was housed over the vacations with a British family. Her parents knowing their Christian faith allowed this with three conditions. She must never go to Church, be preached at or eat pork. These they obeyed, but it was in Sarah's words "a modelling of a lifestyle" that was so attractive. Sarah married Abraham. He came to Britain in 1974, aged twenty-one. Three years later he too followed Jesus. Initially he lived with his own family, but when they moved cities, Abraham was left alone to complete his education. During this time a

Christian couple befriended him. It was they who invited him to a series of evangelistic rallies.

Ten people mentioned the influence and power of the Bible in their decision to follow Jesus. This brought light and understanding. Having seen his friend baptised Tony received John's Gospel, which he read through in one night. He then asked for a whole Bible, and read the four gospels. This brought him greater clarity. When Deborah first heard the gospel at a Carol Service she concluded that she would have to accept what she heard and be disowned by her own family or else become a proper Muslim. She bought a Bible and a Qu'ran and began to compare. Andrew did the Alpha course at a local Church where he was exposed to the Bible's teaching. Ruth's neighbour friend would tell stories about Jesus, and the children would learn verses from the Bible, at the home club she attended. To Ruth these times seemed natural and fun. The presence of God when his word was shared was crucial in Ruth's decision. John was born in India, and travelled a good deal before arriving in Britain. His father was a mullah²⁷ and they belonged to a small but select Shia Sect called the "Twenty Oners." Whilst in Secondary School, surrounded by Muslim peers, John agreed to do a Bible Correspondence course. It was free and John was keen to improve his English. He knew no Christians at all, though he recognised the prophets from his Qu'ranic knowledge, and enjoyed the parables of Jesus. This continued for two years. A girl invited Titus to attend a Bible Study group. He was keen to point out to the Christians how wrong they were. He thought that Christianity offered a "cheap salvation." In his words it was a, "Mickey Mouse religion that was fun and games, like the playground not the battle field." Despite this he began to attend Church, and soon discovered that the salvation offered was not cheap. One verse made this clear. "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows."²⁸ This verse was decisive for him. He put his conversion down to God's word, the love he had received from Christians and the work of the Holy Spirit. Rebekeh's university friend would witness to his new faith, and read the scriptures to her. She liked the way he

²⁷ A mullah is a Muslim religious teacher and leader

²⁸ Luke 12:47

was interested in Islam, but found herself unable to defend it. Her Messianic Jewish friend gave Mary a Bible. For Judah the Spirit speaking to him through the Bible was crucial, and this was also true for Abraham, who not only went to a series of evangelistic rallies, but continues to love hearing the Bible expounded.

Nine people reported that seeing the worshipping Church influenced them. Mostly this was positive, but sometimes it had a confusing influence. Although all the respondents would now be attending evangelical Protestant Churches, a number mentioned the influence of Roman Catholicism²⁹. Christian rallies were mentioned, as well as the general observance of Christian relationships. Barnabas mentioned the relevance of Christianity to real life. In Germany John went with a girl to a Roman Catholic Church but was “confused and disturbed” by the statues. He arrived in Britain in 1969. Determined to find out more about Christianity he visited a Church in the local area. The vicar went out of his way to welcome him, crossing the road to meet his tentative visitor hovering opposite. A South African lady also welcomed him and soon John was in a home group where it was safe to sit, listen and question. At one point she said to him that, “the Holy Spirit can make you a Christian.” John remembers there was little pressure to make a decision. The vicar encouraged him to explore other expressions of Church. Soon John put his faith in Christ. Esther with her mother and sisters began to attend Church secretly, first Roman Catholic, and later Pentecostal. It was during a series of rallies with Billy Graham, attended nightly that Esther finally put her trust in Christ. Mary’s Jewish friend invited her to Church, discreetly because of Mary’s Muslim faith, but it became a regular habit. She became “addicted to the Church.” Confused about Islam, and not really keeping the laws, she said that on several occasions she prayed the “salvation prayer.” When Tony was invited to his friend’s baptism he agreed to attend. He had never been to a Church before. Another Muslim friend came with him. Tony described what they encountered, as “homely, like a family, the music playing, and a peaceful, tranquil atmosphere.” He knew instinctively there was something here he wanted. Barnabas distanced from Islam and its community would occasionally go to

²⁹ At the time of these first encounters the MBBs were unlikely to understand the divisions in Western Christianity generated by the Reformation. The differences between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism would be obscure.

Church particularly when asked to be an usher at a wedding. Gradually he was becoming more open. As he said himself, “his guard was down.” He married a Christian girl in Church, but it was another twelve years before he became a Christian, because of the positive exposure to his wife’s Church. Deborah reported staying with a family over the Christmas vacation, and went with them to a carol service. Here she was both “overwhelmed and horrified” by hearing the Gospel for the first time. She joined the small Christian Union at school. She continued to attend the Church visited at Christmas and four months later became a Christian. Andrew made a decision to follow Christ because of the urgent need of his family’s situation, but was pleasantly surprised to discover a number of Asian Christians already worshipping at the Church. Abraham’s friends invited him to a Christian rally. Although he had been to a Roman Catholic school in South Asia this gave him no attraction to Christianity. He likened the idols he saw to Hinduism, which was offensive. He went to one meeting primarily to criticise Christianity. In fact he went every night of the rally. On the fourth night he had a massive row with his hosts, followed by a disturbed night’s sleep. Despite this he went to the fifth evening and it was here that clarity was given. In his own words, “truth was revealed, imparted by revelation.” When Judah visited a Roman Catholic Church in Europe he had strong compulsions to prostrate himself before the crucifix. Later he met and socialised with Christians who accepted him as he was and did not have, he reported, any hidden agenda of conversion.

Eight people reported a distancing from the Muslim community they grew up in. In some cases this was because of a growing secularisation, influenced by materialism. Titus’ mother was a German Jew. His father was an Egyptian Muslim. Both were western in outlook according to Titus. His father held senior political office. Born in Kuwait, Titus’ early experiences included English breakfasts, Christmas trees and champagne. Strangely, when his sister was discovered one day with a Bible, his father exploded. Later at British University his closest friends were Christians. Despite this his own life was filled with drink, bikes, leathers and the excitement of being a pilot. He owned several houses, rented to students, many of whom were Christians. Barnabas arrived in Britain in 1970, aged twelve. Twenty five years later he too became a follower of Jesus.

He came to a family that was not his real parents.³⁰ He remembers singing hymns and saying Christian prayers at school, but this made little influence. He was a good Muslim boy and practised religiously. He had a great respect for his own father still living in South Asia who he confided lived out his faith by his actions. Here however Barnabas was left to his own devices, and slowly with time tells of a growing independence, an assimilation of Western values, and the loss of his own cultural and religious identity. In short he became a secular person. Work brought greater independence financially and socially, and after ten years he had moved away from Islam. His friends were increasingly white, liberal and non-religious. The monocultural identity of his childhood was replaced by multiculturalism. He carried out none of the expectations of a Muslim marrying a non-Muslim. His wife did not have to change her name, clothes or religion. When his son was born no thought of circumcision, normal for a Muslim boy, crossed his mind. He describes this as a journey away from his own cultural ties.

In other cases the distancing was geographical. Andrew was the youngest child in his traditional Muslim family. Aged eight, his family moved out into the suburbs of their city. At this point his older brother rebelled and refused to go to Mosque. Andrew followed his example. Instead of growing up in a predominantly Muslim area, he now developed friends with children from other ethnic backgrounds, including Sikh and white British. Religion became less important to him. Several respondents made significant decisions whilst away from their families at university. Rebekeh for example began to wear western dress, and go out alone for the first time in her life. She drank, enjoyed the social life, and ate non-halal food³¹. When asked about her faith she would answer, “No I am not a Muslim but my family are.” Andrew studied law at university where he enquired again about Islam, grappling with issues related to prayer and Shariah law. When he returned home, to train as a solicitor, his aim was to live a good life. Here he married a girl and like Barnabas had a Church service. Some of his family attended.

³⁰ Barnabas reported to me that it was a common practice among South Asians arriving in the 1960s/70s to come to families that were not their own. Fathers living in Britain claimed tax credits for children they had back in South Asia. These children did not in practice exist. When their families were sent for, children from other families were included to make up the numbers. Thus Barnabas arrived in 1970 but to a family who were not his real parents.

³¹ Halal Food is food sanctioned by Muslim law.

Josephine became a follower of Christ at twenty whilst away at university. Mary and Judah had significant Christian friends at university. By contrast some seem to come to faith in Jesus just at the point when Islam means a great deal to them. The Iranian Revolution took place in 1979. For Deborah this was a time of pride in Islam and Iranian culture. The students “really got into Islam” she reflects. It was an intellectual movement. Although her mother supported the changes, her father opposed them and when some of their family friends were imprisoned, Deborah was sent to Boarding School in Britain. Here she remained a staunch supporter of the Revolution, praying five times a day, though personally struggling with this regime.

Seven people reported the importance of books and education as a positive influence. Mary came to Britain at the age of seven in 1978. She had very little English. Her father had started work here in the 1950s initially coming on his own and sending money home to the family. Mary was an enthusiastic pupil. In the library she found books which had pictures in them of Jesus. “Strange,” she says, “that he had blonde hair and blue eyes.” Deborah attended an international school in Iran. Here she observed some of the Christian festivals, Christmas and Easter. She heard reference to titles like Son of God, which she described as, “very absurd, as absurd as worshipping idols.” Coming from a wealthy and influential family, with a good education, Deborah loved English literature. Aged thirteen she read a secular book, *Shogun*³², set in Medieval Japan, one of whose chief characters was a Jesuit priest. This fascinated her and she became interested in Roman Catholicism. Later a new English teacher arrived at the school. Although Iranian, she wore a cross around her neck which intrigued Deborah. One day she asked the teacher if she was a Catholic. Her teacher refused to answer. Later, in Britain, and more interested in the gospel, she started to read testimonies of people who had become Christians. Josephine’s initial interest was academic, through Religious Education lessons in the 1970s. A more personal interest grew when she read an American Christian magazine, which was pushed through their door. The Bible Correspondence course that John did was to improve his English. When ten, Titus was sent to a Church of England Preparatory School. Here he began to hear the Gospel stories. For GCSE he

³² James Clavell: *Shogun* 1975

studied Luke's Gospel which he memorised. Reading the biographical account of Bilquis Sheikh, *I Dared to Call Him Father*³³, allowed Rebekeh to ask more questions. Barnabas remembers singing hymns and saying prayers at school, but remains unsure of their long-term influence.

A distancing from Islam has already been seen in some stories. Even stronger were the negative affects which came as a result of violence and stringent rules causing disillusionment. Seven respondents reported this. Lydia failed to understand the punishment she received at the Mosque for making mistakes. She couldn't see Allah as compassionate. Although she kept trying to convince herself that Islam was the truth, she was drawn to the spiritual and mystical elements of Hinduism. Esther's father was a scary figure in her life, sometimes violent, and always oppressive. His aim seemed to be to force Islam on the girls through fear. The family looked forward to the times when he travelled. Josephine's family had arrived from South Asia in the 1960s. She had a narrow and strict upbringing, "very traditional" in her own words. She was taught to read the Qu'ran and grew up with a fear of God, but no concept of being loved by Him. Andrew struggled to understand the need for the rules and nobody seemed able to explain Islam to him simply and clearly. At twenty and with family problems brewing John left home and travelled to Iraq, Dubai and finally into Germany. His Middle Eastern experience left him with "some serious questions about Islam." Less offensive, but still troubling was Abraham's viewing of a television programme. Watching Magnus Magnusson's "In the Footsteps of Abraham," Abraham found to his astonishment that Mecca, the home of Mohammed, descendent of Ishmael, was not even mentioned in the programme. This triggered questions in his own mind. Rebekeh's family arrived in Britain in 1964. She was born four years later in a northern city. She describes her upbringing as a typical working class, traditional Asian family. For her this meant no western dress and no boyfriends. Her father was a faithful Muslim, with much integrity, but also prone to violence. Islam was part of her life. During her teenage years she rebelled somewhat which meant in practise not fasting during Ramadan. At seventeen

³³ *I Dared to Call Him Father* tells the story of Bilquis Sheikh, a Pakistani lady of high rank, who became a follower of Jesus.

she observed a fellow Muslim wearing western dress. She became aware of the fact that there were educated Muslims. She read the Qu'ran in translation, and concluded without influence from elsewhere that she did not want to stay a Muslim.

Thus distance from the Islamic community, geographical, educational, psychological or sociological allows for Muslims to be open to the gospel. Push and pull factors exist here. The violence which some respondents reported pushed them away from Islam. The more liberal western mindset pulls some towards other ways of seeing the world including the attraction of Christianity. Titus gave a striking illustration of this point. He likened the Muslim community to a magnet, and the individual within it to an iron filing. The stronger the community, the further away from it one has to go to escape its pull.

Six people spoke of experiencing the miraculous or mysterious in their lives, not accountable using normal rationality. For Mary a decisive event, akin she says to Paul's Damascus Road experience happened. Utterly desperate, alone in her room, she prayed for peace. What followed she says was an overwhelming experience. She felt the touch of God on her head, and this went right through to her feet. Although she never opened her eyes she was aware of a light in the room. It was like a loving father, cradling her, a little baby. She knew that this experience was not of this world. A very strange event took place when Tony and his Muslim friend arrived at Church for his friend's baptism. Unsure of protocol and doubting that they should ever have come, they hovered outside. Someone in his 40s with a long black coat came along and asked them if they were waiting to go in. When Tony answered, "We do not know, we are just deciding," the man replied, "Well I've not been here before would you like to come with me?" Having agreed they proceed in together. From that point on neither Tony, his friend, nor anyone in the Church has any recollection of seeing that person. Judah became a Christian at eighteen. From nine nightmares had plagued his childhood, terrifying him. His only solace was a cross, which he wore, and the prayers he was able to say to Jesus. He also read the Old Testament part of a Children's Bible. The nightmares did not happen from the moment that he wore the cross at fourteen. To him this was a miraculous event. He explained to me that he was definitely on a journey to Jesus, but only with hindsight

could see it. The more mystical side of Islam, Sufism, appealed to him. When he visited a Roman Catholic Church in Europe he had strong compulsions to prostrate himself before the crucifix. Being a Muslim this troubled him. His own father was an imam³⁴. Brought up in a good family, Judah had to be guarded about his real thoughts. Although he had some Church and Christian contact he regards his own conversion as happening outside of normal channels. He did not say a sinner's prayer; did not have a good understanding of the gospel, nor was there ever a clear presentation given to him. He thinks of Jesus as having met him at his point of need³⁵. Paul studied at a Roman Catholic mission school, but was not interested in the gospel. In fact he became a Muslim fundamentalist. His brother, who was a follower of Jesus, allowed Paul to move in with him when he went to university in a different city. This arrangement did not last long because of their staunchly different religious positions. Nevertheless when Paul was involved in a serious motorbike accident, it was his brother who visited his bedside. He remained in hospital for five weeks, in a coma for some time after the accident. There was a real danger that Paul would lose his eye. Distraught and suicidal he was amazed when his brother pleaded with him not to give up hope. Defiantly Paul asked, "What type of hope are you talking about?" His brother talked about Jesus, mentioned in the Qu'ran, the healer. "If he can do it two thousand years ago he can do it now. If you reject this Paul you have no hope." Although Paul verbally threw his brother out of the room, the words sunk deep. He prayed a prayer of commitment to Jesus, on condition that he was healed. He felt a peace for the first time since the accident. He promised to follow, obey and commit the rest of his life to him. When his brother returned he told him of his decision. "If I don't get healed you must stop talking about Jesus," he shouted. When the bandages were removed, he could see perfectly well from both eyes. Paul puts his faith down to the miraculous healing, his brother and the power of prayer. At fifteen Sarah asked God in sincerity to show her the right way. The details of the "quiet voice" which she heard are recorded below. As Lydia was contemplating becoming a Christian she received an instantaneous picture of God holding a baby child. This child she

³⁴ An imam is a Muslim teacher and leader

³⁵ Ruth too used this same expression, "Jesus meets you where you are at."

described as being “totally protected and covered.” It was Lydia herself. She knew that Allah would not act in this way. The vision was defining for her.

The influence of prayer in the decision making process was important for six MBBs. Sarah would sit on the stairs of the Christian family she stayed with and listen in to family prayers. “What’s the difference?” she kept asking herself, and this brought confusion. This went on for several years. At fifteen she asked God sincerely to show her the right way. In her head she heard the words “I am the way, and the truth and the life, no one comes to the father but by me.”³⁶ Sarah had never heard these words before. She asked her guardian who explained them fully to her. John put his conversion down to the message of God’s love with the certainty of salvation, the global catholic nature of intercessory prayer, and the fellowship with believers, that sense of belonging. Abraham saw his journey to Christ as taking three years. He put his conversion down to the Christian life witness of his friends, including their prayer life. Paul put his faith down to the miraculous healing, his brother and the power of prayer. It was in desperation that Mary prayed to God for peace in her life, and received it. Tony too experienced the power of prayer. He heard himself really praying, “God if you are out there show me something.”

Five people reported that the life and character of Jesus Christ consumed them. When Tony’s friend gave her testimony at Church, his question became “Who is this Jesus?” and “Why did he have to die?” He became transfixed with Jesus having read the gospel narrative, using words in the interview like “amazed” and “astounded”. He asked for a whole Bible, and proceeded to read through the gospels. For the first time in his life he heard himself really praying. “God if you are out there show me something.” One night he asked Jesus why he had to die. In response there was a quiet voice, reminding him that he knew why in his own heart, that if he accepted Jesus all would be revealed and that if he rejected him, the peace which he had been experiencing would be lost. Tony invited Jesus into his life. When asked about the three factors that influenced him, Tony refused to say anything beyond the life and person of Jesus Christ. Josephine too was

³⁶ John 14:6

drawn to “the beauty of Jesus”, mentioning his “purity of character.” The words of John, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”³⁷ became meaningful to her. When asked what were the three factors that influenced her Deborah replied, “who Jesus said He was, what He could do for me and that I would go to Heaven.” Ruth’s neighbour’s testimony centred on Jesus so Jesus too became Ruth’s focus. For Judah the cross of Jesus was central.

Whilst no one mentioned it directly, the fact that all the respondents, with the exception of Barnabas and John, did so when they were under thirty years of age is significant. In many cases the average age was nearer twenty. At this point in life one begins to write ones own worldview, normally inherited in childhood. As adulthood is approached, this inherited worldview is strengthened or rejected in favour of something superior. It is a time of natural openness, and is a common time for people to become Christians. Later opportunities provide themselves when a person’s chosen worldview breaks down in the light of illness, job loss, separation from spouse or a host of other circumstances which causes them to reassess life’s meaning. At these points the discerning Christian can speak words of comfort and hope. One respondent confided that she would go back to Islam if she could, suggesting that others might have considered this when their newly chosen way of seeing the world led to long term difficulties not solutions. By contrast to these youthful decisions John’s journey took him over twenty years from that early Bible Correspondence course, and Barnabas’ twenty-five years.

Thus to summarise fourteen MBBs chose to follow Jesus either as children or young adults. Thirteen reported experiencing some type of personal need, confusion or question, which weighed heavily. Theirs was a personal search. Thirteen also reported knowing one or more Christians, be they an elder of some influence, a peer friend, a family member who had chosen to follow Jesus or even a Christian family that they stayed with. Engaging with the Bible reported by ten people, as well as with Christians assembled together reported by nine people, are important for Muslims in their journey to Jesus Christ. Initial needs, followed by significant Christian friendships are enhanced

³⁷ 1John 4:10

when they begin to read, study and understand the Bible, and as they see the nature of Christian corporate life. Eight people, including seven who had negative Muslim experiences reported distancing from the Islamic community. Books and education pointed seven in the direction of Jesus Christ. Six respondents experienced the miraculous or mysterious, and six also focused on prayer. Five MBBs were enthralled by the person of Jesus Christ.

Most noticeable in these results is the enormous variety. No two stories are identical. No single methodological approach is dominant. Each person was treated in a unique way. Whilst principles are clear; an honest search, a Christian friendship, an openness to the Bible and the life of Jesus, a willingness to watch and observe Christians meeting together, genuine heartfelt prayer, some distancing from the Muslim community and God's direct intervention through the mysterious; the details are as diverse as the people themselves. A process is evident rather than a single event, but whilst for some the length of the process is short, a few months to a year, in other cases the length of time is as much as quarter of a century.

Thus to paint a picture: a young Muslim person, distanced from their home and community, meeting and befriending Christians, searching for answers to big questions, open to visiting their places of worship, reading their scriptures, and praying with honesty to God is most likely to end up becoming a follower of Jesus. These findings confirm other research done in this area.³⁸

³⁸ In *Called from Islam to Christ* Jean-Marie Gaudeul, a White Father analyses well over one hundred conversions, from written sources. His chapter titles point to the same reasons as I have concluded. They are, "Yes Conversion is Possible"; "Jesus is so Attractive"; "Thirst for Truth"; "Without Family"; "God's Community The Search"; "God's Community The Discovery"; "The Need for Forgiveness"; "The Thirst for God"; "A Call from God". Steve Bell in *Friendship First* argues that in his own experience Muslims follow Jesus for four reasons. If they read the Bible with an open mind, knowing a Christian person over a period of time, sincere comparison and search through the Qu'ran to the Bible and a supernatural intervention by God. He also states that in a piece of research carried out in the United States at a theological institute which looked at over six hundred conversions, the four reasons most cited were; the certainty of salvation in Christ compared to the uncertainty of the Islamic condition; the character of Christ being attractive; the character and testimony of Christians that the Muslims knew and supernatural intervention by God in over 25% of those interviewed. This included dreams, visions of angels or Jesus himself, healings and other miraculous occurrences such as hearing voices.

Under such circumstances what should the response of the Church and Christians be? It is evident from the stories that those who were open to befriend, meet, engage with, welcome, share the gospel, and their lives were an inspiration to the MBBs. Whilst some confrontation took place, a sign perhaps of inward turmoil in the MBB, the posture of the Christians was positive not negative, gentle not polemic, engaged not distanced. In cases where this process took a long time some cannot even now be aware of the influence that they had on the MBBs journey to Christ. Instead of guarding, defending and championing certain distinct methodological evangelistic approaches, openness to God, the Holy Spirit and the people themselves seems more vital. Christians should not be afraid of the power of the Bible³⁹ and the influence of prayer. Friendship, small initiatives undertaken in the normal course of life and a willingness to engage with Muslims is essential. In these post 9/11 and 7/7 days the Church should do everything it can to close the gap, standing side by side with Muslims living in Britain. Instead of confirming Muslim views on the decadence of the West, it could become the beacon of light, which Jesus Christ himself desired it to be.

Paul had done his own piece of research in a South East Asian context, which he related to me. In terms of factors, which helped Muslims come to Christ, he cited five. These were extra ordinary events happening of which 50% of those he interviewed had some experience; knowing individual Christians of which 25% had heard some very positive testimonies; the role of the Church, though strangely this was more negative than positive and only became positive after their conversion; the personal struggles and questions which 100% of his respondents had, including issues related to sin and forgiveness as well as the meaning of life questions; and fifthly the effects of Christian literature and outreach material which in his research included the Bible.

Steve Bell says in *Friendship First*, “In certain countries there have been ‘people movements’ where whole families, clans, villages or people groups believe the Good News at the same time. However, this is much more rare and most often, they come in a steady trickle as individuals.” p62. The author knows of at least three places in the world where the former has taken place. Clearly the latter truth is the case with my respondents. An interesting question might be what would have to happen, or be done differently in order for the former to be accomplished in Britain. For whilst Jesus’ statement about there being much joy in heaven over one sinner who repents holds true the resultant extraction of the convert from his or her culture rarely leads to a big impact upon that community, and certainly very little movement of the gospel.

B. How the MBBs and their families reacted to conversion

The second part of the questionnaire looked at the reaction the respondents experienced when they converted. The fact that Mary thought “conversion” should be replaced with “realisation” on the questionnaire highlights this as a sensitive issue. What does conversion mean? How do we define it?⁴⁰ The author wanted to find out what their own reaction was, and also to explore the reaction of their family. The four questions that related to this were; briefly describe your own reaction to becoming a Christian. Were you given any advice or help in how to communicate with your family about your decision? What time gap existed between choosing to follow Jesus and informing your family of that decision? Briefly describe any reaction that they had upon knowing that you were a Christian.

Table 3 shows this information. It tells how long the MBBs took to inform their families; whether all their family know about their decision; if they received any help from the Christian community on how to do this and what their ongoing relationship with family is like. Inevitably in tabular form this has to be the briefest of comments, but the exact words which those interviewed wrote or said have been used.

³⁹ For example 2Timothy 3:16 or Hebrews 4:12,13 which speaks of the Bible’s power to change lives

⁴⁰ Des Harper spends chapter 2 of his MA Thesis *Why South Asians in Britain Come to Christ: Factors in the Conversion to Christ of People of Other Faiths* analysing what conversion is. In quoting Rambo he says, “ Rambo concludes his seminal work on religious conversion by saying that,

Conversion is paradoxical. It is elusive. It is inclusive. It destroys and it saves. Conversion is sudden and it is gradual. It is created totally by the action of God, and it is created totally by the action of humans. Conversion is personal and communal, private and public. It is both passive and active. It is a retreat from the world. It is a resolution of conflict and an empowerment to go into the world and to confront, if not create, conflict. Conversion is an event and a process. It is an ending and a beginning. It is final and open-ended. Conversion leaves us devastated—and transformed.” p11

Theologians, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, historians and many others have studied this phenomenon. My purpose here is not so much to get into what might be considered an abstract, if not vital argument, rather it is to listen to the voices of those I interviewed. With the exception of Mary they were happy to accept the terminology, knowing that at one point they would have regarded themselves as Muslim, and that at another they would prefer to use the term Christian. Not only did they know that a change had taken place, but the community around them, be it friends, or more particularly family also recognised that something significant had happened.

Table 3 – Family Reaction to Conversion

Name	Told Family	Advice Given	Extended Family Know	Relationship Now
Abraham	9m	No	Yes	No Contact / Improving
Andrew	Broths 1m Parents 2y	No	No	Good / Strained
Barnabas	Sister 1m Others Years	No	No	Goodish
Deborah	2y	No	No	Good / Not close
Esther	1y	Some	Yes	Positive / No Contact
John	2 y	No	Yes	Superficially accept
Josephine	1 y	No	No	Healing but pain
Judah	2 m	No	Yes	Parents Strain / Amicable Siblings Better / Acceptance
Lydia	3y	No	Mostly	Excellent / very close
Mary	3y / 4y	No	Some / Not All	Better / closer
Paul	Little contact	No	Yes	Little Relationship
Rebekeh	Siblings 3 m Parents 4 y	Yes, a little	Mostly	Some healing
Ruth	12 y	No / Some	Yes	Very special
Sarah	2y	No	Not as such	Distant / Some Contact
Titus	Immediately	Yes	Yes	Good / But issues
Tony	Not Done	Some hints	None	Assume he is Muslim.

Key

Name	= Pseudonyms used throughout the study
Told Family	= How long it took them to tell their families.
M	= Months.
Y	= Years.
Advice Given	= was any advice given by Christians, Church or the Christian Community?
Extended Family Know	= do all in your extended family know that you are a Christian?
Relationship Now	= what is your relationship like with your family now?

The table highlights a number of features. Eleven of those interviewed took two or more years to inform their parents of the decision that they made. This not only shows the importance of this step, but also that the decision to follow Jesus was not taken lightly. Many lived with uncertainty and concern through this period, not knowing the reaction they would receive. Tony’s family, even after being a Christian for ten years, still do not know of his faith. Seven of those interviewed took more than three years to get to this point. Nine of those interviewed were not known as Christians by all their extended family. This should not necessarily surprise as in many cases their extended families

stretch throughout the world and are very large. Nonetheless it points as much to the fact that their immediate family do not wish for the news of their conversion to travel quickly. Siblings were often told sooner, and were more accepting than the parents.

No help or advice on how to communicate with their family was given to twelve respondents. Whilst many in the Church have little understanding of the importance of the extended family to an MBB, this says more about western individualism, than it does about Biblical Christianity. Barnabas reported that he had received no advice at all, being “treated like any other believer.” When family is so important to an MBB it is difficult to understand this silence. Surely the very thing which is uppermost on the part of the new believer, the family, should at least be taken seriously by those entrusted to nurture them?

There is some trace evidence that those with the best relationships with their family now are those that took longer to speak about their new faith. Those who told straight away or quickly generally had a more difficult time. Also interesting is that when advice was offered it slowed the process down in telling family about their new faith. Just like a new born baby, for all the joy and wonder it brings, often make a mess, so those flush with the experience of their new liberty in Christ, may not be able to sensitively communicate. With time, advice and a growing maturity, they may choose wiser words, and stir up less hostility. Nevertheless since becoming a Christian is so alien to the Muslim community no simple guarantees could be given at this point.

What is clear however is a desire on the part of the MBBs to do everything in their power to restore relationships with their families. For many this has taken years, is fraught with difficulties, and still bears painful wounds. The final column shows the tension that exists between the two. People stated apparent contradictions as “strained but amicable,” “improving but no contact,” “good but not close,” and “healing but pain.” This was not dishonesty, but a desire for something better, lost because of their decisions to follow Jesus. It is hard to imagine, from a western perspective, the cost incurred for many who

loved their families, whose lives revolved around these networks, whose relationships meant much, to sacrifice these in pursuit of Jesus Christ. In short their decisions to follow Jesus resulted in a good deal of pain, suffering, sacrifice and persecution, not only for themselves but in many cases for their families too.

All of the respondents were happy with becoming Christians. Mary said, “It was exciting to be a follower of Jesus. I was comforted by thinking of the eternal prize.” Barnabas told me that once the decision had been made he felt freed and liberated. Deborah said, “The biggest thing was knowing I was going to heaven.” Ruth said, “I was pleased because my question of whether or not I could know God personally was answered.” Esther simply listed her feelings; peaceful, excited, profound joy, empowering. She added, “My personal relationship with Jesus meant a lot to me. I felt special and set apart.” Abraham felt, “Wonderful and very grateful to be forgiven by Christ and complete deliverance from guilt and punishment of my sins.” Rebekeh used words like wholeness, healing, hope and inner confidence to describe how she felt. Judah too used the word “confident” to describe his reaction.

Some were surprised, even amazed that it had happened to them. Lydia said, “Very surprised, I always thought born a Muslim die a Muslim.” Likewise Sarah said, “Utter amazement, I would never have considered changing religions.” Deborah noted that conversion for a Muslim is a very confusing thing, more of a process or a journey than an event. In this she seemed to echo something of what John felt when he described his conversion as, “A journey of exploration and revelation.”

Others talked of changes in their lives, a sign that something significant had taken place. Tony noted, “I had peace. My attitude changed. I stopped swearing. It came naturally.” Titus concluded that his life had been, “...transformed. This was a gradual process, but God is dealing with my arrogance, ambition, pride, greed and lust.” Judah observed, “A strong desire to develop my own identity outside of family and Islam.”

Some thought it the beginning of their problems, and many expressed sympathy and sensitivity about the reaction of their family. Mary said, “I became concerned for my Muslim family.” More dramatically Josephine said she felt, “Sheer terror and deep anguish at the thought of our parents’ reaction.” She was concerned as to whether she would have the courage and discipline and commitment to lead this new life. Andrew put it this way; “It felt a big decision in terms of no turning back and not knowing the reaction of my family and community whilst also feeling it was the right decision.”

Paul alone expressed the fact that he did not want to become a Christian but had been, “Confronted by Jesus,” and had no option but to become his follower. Not so much a choice here as a compulsion.

Whilst the reaction of the respondents was universally positive, that of their families and communities was entirely the opposite. Lydia explained, “They isolated me. They considered me unclean. My mom cried buckets and buckets. Now that I was considered unclean all my possessions were kept separate from the rest of the family.” Josephine’s experience was even more distressing. Along with her sister she was carried back to South Asia where she remained a prisoner for the next seven years, her sister for ten. Here they were in fear of losing their lives. Their Bibles and other Christian literature were confiscated. “There was a constant pressure on us to give up our Christian faith. We lived in an atmosphere of unpredictable tension and anguish.” In time and with no hope of them changing their minds they were released. When all else failed Sarah’s family tried to kill her and she had to be rescued by her Christian friends. Esther experienced a member of the community spitting on the ground when she was seen with the pastor. “They stopped speaking and visiting,” she said. Her father’s friends also “interrogated” her. In John’s case too, members of the community tried to persuade him to renounce his decision. Rebekeh’s mother refused to have any contact for a year and effectively “threw her out.” Judah’s family felt, “Shock, betrayal, I’m throwing my life away.” His father hit him when he told him of his decision. Paul thought that his family did not really care and have forgotten who he is.

Several of those interviewed felt their decision was ignored as though it had not happened. Mary noted that it was “Almost like they didn’t hear me.” Deborah agrees when she says, “My father just ignored it and thought I would grow out of it.” Initially this was Sarah’s experience. Even stronger was the reaction of Andrew’s mother. “In terms of my conversion she simply does not accept that a Muslim can become a Christian.” Rebekeh’s siblings assumed it was just a phase, as did Judah’s family.

In some cases mitigating circumstances were used as justification. Barnabas who had been married for ten years before conversion explained that because his wife had not become a Muslim, his relatives assumed that he must have become a Christian⁴¹. In Deborah’s case it was because she had an English boyfriend that the family thought she had become a Christian. Abraham’s family blamed Sarah and Sarah’s family blamed Abraham though in fact both were Christians before they met and married.

Time passed, but as some families gained more evidence their reaction strengthened. Deborah explained, “My mother became much more involved and disapproving when she herself arrived in the UK three years later.” Abraham’s family reacted at first with “Total bewilderment and shock.” Later this became “Anger and total rejection.”

Another fear was the effect the decisions would have on the wider family. Andrew explains that, “My sister is very upset in terms of the effect this will have on my parents and the wider community.” The possible side effects are illustrated in Ruth’s case. “I know that a couple of my uncles were extremely disappointed and to express their grief they didn’t eat.” The community considered Esther’s father a failure. John’s immediate family was concerned “about its standing and honour in the community.” Judah, too, was asked if he understood about family honour, and that he was jeopardising his siblings’ future.

⁴¹This is understandable when one realises that because Islam is a whole way of life, social, cultural, spiritual and political, Muslims think all white British people are Christians. The idea of being an atheist is irrational. Just because somebody might argue that he is secular and irreligious does not mean that he can’t

In some cases, like Sarah, bribes were used to tempt the person back. In her own words, “They then tried to tempt me back to Islam with material gifts.” “Considerable material gifts” were also offered to Abraham to change his mind. By contrast Judah was informed that Islam is superior to Christianity and “that 90% of Christians do not practise what they preach.”

Titus alone had a fairly positive reaction. “My mother generally felt that if it made me happy then that’s OK.” One of his sisters who had previously been a secret believer now could be more open about her faith. Another sister soon became a Christian. His middle sister although the one who struggled the most “regularly told me that I had become a better person.” Rebekeh’s siblings too have “always been supportive.”

The stories show what a crucial and hard time this is. Emotions are at extremes; negative and positive. Generally the MBBs are elated and happy with their decision. They have answers to serious questions; an assured relationship with God denied them in Islamic thought, a new way of seeing the world, and a positive outlook. By contrast their families cannot accept the answer they have reached, deny the possibility of a relationship with God outside of Islamic practice, refute their new way of seeing the world and have a negative outlook. The family may come under some pressure from the wider Muslim community. Some conflict and confrontation is inevitable. Under such circumstances the interplay between the MBB and their family is critical. Some like Tony reveal nothing, and remain secret believers. Others are highly selective in what they make known. Barnabas confided that he is happy to be alive after ten years because of his wise responses. Others like the apostle Peter deny the Lord when confronted directly. This happened to Abraham, a month before his baptism, when asked directly by his father whether he had become a Christian. Four months later he told his family he had in fact become a Christian. After denying it two times previously, Ruth’s hand was forced when another Christian informed her mother of her new faith. She said she had

be a Christian. Just as in Islam there are good and bad Muslims so white British people are good or bad Christians.

been “like a bird locked up in a cage. The cage was opened and I was totally free.” For Lydia going to Church was a “clandestine affair” involving a good deal of deception.

Under these charged circumstances the Church should be present and aware, as opposed to absent and unaware; concerned and caring as opposed to unconcerned and uncaring; sensitive and diplomatic as opposed to insensitive and aggressive. Lydia confided that when she was baptised and then told her family, no one from the Church helped in this process. “There was no refuge and support available” she explained. This hurt Lydia a good deal. MBBs may choose not to reveal as much to Church leaders, or Christian friends about their background as might be desirable. Regardless of this the decision to follow Jesus is so monumental that they should have available to them as much support as possible through this initial period when the emotions are at extremes from both themselves, their families and the wider Muslim community.

Chapter 4

The Stories of Integration and Discipleship

A. How the MBBs were received by the British Church

Next the research looked at what happened after the decisions to follow Jesus had been taken. In particular to what extent the Church was able to replace the new believer's original community. How did the MBB fit into the Church, which not so long ago was an alien place to them? What happened which helped or hindered their ongoing journey as disciples of Jesus Christ?

A number of questions on the questionnaire highlighted this period. These were; at the point of deciding to follow Jesus did you have any Church contact? What was your concept of the Church at the point of deciding to follow Jesus? Did you see it favourably or unfavourably? What were your own expectations of the Church (if any) at this time? What were the expectations of those in the Church about you (if any) at this time? Jot down something of the process, which took place in you becoming an active member of the Church. What sorts of timings were involved here? Was it a smooth steady process? How long did it take before you felt integrated into the life of the Church? How many Churches have you been a member of over the years? The ten questions allowed those interviewed much opportunity to reflect on this part of their journey.

Table 4 brings together facts and statements, giving some idea of how integration went. Following their names, baptism, often the sign of entrance into Church life is next. How long the respondents themselves felt the process of integration took is next, followed by whether they thought this was a smooth process or more difficult. Finally is the number of Churches they have been committed to, though not necessarily in formal membership of. This question was asked because it is more likely that a person struggling with

integration will move around, never quite finding the place to fit. Where words are used instead of figures they echo what the respondent said or wrote.

Table 4 - Process of Integration

Name	Christian	Baptism	Integration	Smooth Steady Process	Churches
Abraham	28	6m	Immediately	No	4
Andrew	7	10m	<1y	Yes	1
Barnabas	10	No Comment	Immediately	Yes	1
Deborah	24	2y	Instantly	Yes	5
Esther	21	2y	not long	Yes	2
John	35	No Comment	1y	No Comment	3
Josephine	24	No Comment	A few years	No	1
Judah	19	11m	Soon / Issues	No	6/7
Lydia	18	3y	4y	Pretty Smooth	3
Mary	8	5y	1y	No	3
Paul	22	No Comment	11y	No	3
Rebekeh	17	4y	No Comment	No	5
Ruth	17	9y	1y	Yes	3
Sarah	33	2y	No Comment	No	3
Titus	4	1m	Soon	Yes	2
Tony	10	No Comment	No Comment	No	3

Key

- Name = Pseudonyms used throughout the study.
- Christian = How long they have been Christians - in years.
- Baptism = How long after conversion this took place.
- Integration = How long they felt this took place.
- Smooth Steady Process = Was their integration smooth and steady.
- Churches = How many have they been committed to over the years.
- Y = Years.
- M = Months.

The table presents a mixed picture. On the whole baptisms took place quite quickly after conversion. In some cases people have not been baptised or made no comment to this affect. In Ruth's case, it must be remembered she became a follower of Jesus as a young child, and was in her very early twenties when she was baptised. For much of this time she did not attend Church, so baptism only took place three years after she began to go regularly. If we take this as a more realistic figure eleven of our respondents were baptised less than five years from the point of conversion, and 50% were baptised less than three years from their conversion.

There is a similar response in the column entitled integration. With the exception of Paul, and those who made no comment, the majority of the respondents felt that they were integrated within a few years of conversion. Paul is exceptional because throughout this entire period, still living in a South Asian context, he had no Church links⁴². There does not seem a direct and simple link between baptism and integration. In some cases baptism comes first, whilst in others perceived integration precedes baptism.

Despite these positive responses, when it comes to whether the process was smooth and steady the majority of people answered no. There seems no straightforward link between those who were baptised and integrated quickly and those who answered yes to this question. Whilst Lydia, Barnabas, Esther, Deborah, Andrew and Titus seem to present positive and consistent responses, there appears to be some contradiction in what is being reported by for example Mary, Sarah, Abraham, Rebekeh and Judah.

Four of these five have also been members of the most Churches over the years. Only Deborah from my first list competes with them. Care needs to be taken here. With greater mobility, travel, job opportunity and so forth it is easier for people today both to move cities and move Churches. Belonging to a number of Churches may in fact reflect nothing negative at all. Nevertheless those who answered yes to smooth steady integration have tended, with the exception of Deborah to have been in fewer Churches than those who answered no or made no comment. Josephine is the other exception. Although she answered no to the process, she in fact has been a consistent member of just one Church.

Six of those I interviewed had no formal contact with a Church before they followed Jesus, but all had relationships with Christians. The other ten all had some experience of Church life, which varied from regular attendance, doing a course like Alpha, being part of a home group or in some cases a few visits. Of the six that had no contact three

⁴² It was when Paul moved to another South East Asian country that he discovered something of Church life.

reported that they saw the Church in an unfavourable light. Two were less negative using words like “neutral” with regard to their view of the Church. One person, Lydia, just said, “I thought it was purely for white or African Caribbean people.” Of the ten respondents who had some Church contact, eight saw this as favourable. Sarah said, “It was a family of people who cared for me very genuinely, and a place where I could hear more about my new God.” John simply used the words, “very supportive.” Esther described it as, “like a new family.” Deborah saw the Church, “very favourably.” Andrew reported “yes and no” to the question which perhaps highlights a tension that all MBBs might face. Tony saw the Church in an unfavourable light even though in his testimony he wanted what he saw the people in Church had. Mary reported that she, “thought Christians were mad” because of what she saw at the Pentecostal Church her friend took her to. Interestingly she added that she thought, “You had to be sinless to go to Church.” This seems to illustrate a certain confusion and misinformation of how Muslims view Christians, which might even stem from the Qu’ran itself, where Christians are viewed at times positively and at times negatively⁴³.

Of the six people who had no contact with Church four had no expectations of it whatsoever. Judah who knew some Christians said, “As I was surrounded by Christians my view of Church was that it was full of people who loved, cared for and supported one another.” By contrast, Lydia commented “That it was incredibly boring like the images on Songs of Praise.” Josephine although having no expectations personally, added that she thought the Word of God would be taught and preached. Of the ten who did have some contact three reported that they had no expectations. Mary said, “I was looking for guidance and love.” Similarly Esther “sought emotional and practical support.” Rebekeh used the same words as Esther adding, “That it would be like a community or extended family.” Barnabas who was somewhat older when he followed Jesus had positive

⁴³ Abdullah Yusuf Ali: *The Meaning of the Glorious Qu’ran*. See for example Sura 5:82. “Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say ‘We are Christians’; because among these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.” This positive view of Christians in relation to Muslim believers is contrasted with for example Sura 5:73 on the opposite page. “They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity; for there is no God except one Allah. If they desist not from their word of blasphemy verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them.”

expectations, yet a realistic understanding of Church weaknesses. Deborah reported that she was convinced she would be fully integrated into the life of the Church. Andrew, who had been to several guest services, enjoyed them, and liked the charismatic feel, felt that this was something he had not expected. The number of South Asians already worshipping at the Church also encouraged him. John used the words “fellowship” and “belonging” when answering this question on expectations.

Of the six who had no Church contact three made no comment on any expectation the Church might have of them. Josephine made the assumption that the Church would want her to “fit in.” Interestingly Lydia and Judah reported the same idea in different ways. Judah said, “To be prepared to be open and honest and share my experience of becoming a believer as an encouragement to others.” More telling, Lydia suggested that the Church was, “very pleased to have an ex-Muslim in their midst, not sure if this was because of their outreach plans or to have one up on some of the other Churches in a Muslim community.” Both statements point to the fact that these new believers might become centres of attention. Of the ten who had some Church contact five reported that they did not know, or were not sure of expectations the Church had of them. Rebekeh echoing the thoughts of Judah and Lydia said, “I was a novelty, the first Muslim convert to be baptised. There was a sense of excitement at my arrival.” Reflecting on what was said to him Barnabas commented that there were, “some informed comments and some stupid comments.” Tony reported that they liked him as a person and he was taken under the wing of an older lady who he became close to. Deborah reiterated the point about being fully integrated. Esther too saw the whole process in a positive light. “The Church saw lots of talent in us. The old pastor and his family had just left the Church. They used to do everything. We three sisters were asked to be involved in singing, drama, youth and nurture groups. We were expected to be involved, giving a sense of acceptance and belonging, even though people knew very little about where we came from culturally.”

The evidence, both in the table and the personal comments, points to the fact that the process of integration has not been easy for the respondents. This should not surprise us. The MBBs have come from a different faith background, one that has largely been a

challenge to and opponent of Christianity for many centuries. They were raised with that sense of opposition or suspicion to Christianity. Today, with a resurgent Islam, an even stronger message of defiance and challenge to those who follow Jesus Christ is being heard. Not only this, but the parallel decline in the West's confidence in its own religious inheritance, means that this traditional structure of security, the Church, is itself questioning its role and contribution to society. Add to this a different, eastern mindset, whose values are far more communal and co-dependent than they are individual and autonomous, and one begins to see why at a social, cultural and even political level converts from Islam would find British Church structures with all their variety, difficult to come to terms with. Furthermore the Church itself makes a mistake when it assumes itself to be a place open to all, without seriously assessing its own cultural bias. Whilst desirous of theological oneness in obedience to Jesus' teaching in John 17, the Church fails to grasp its inherent Britishness. In some ways the very denominations themselves speak as much about cultural diversity as they do theological diversity.

This is born out by comments made during the extended, relaxed interview. Even those who hitherto had been positive about their integration into the Church added words of frustration. Josephine said, "It seems that Churches expect new believers to adapt to them, a European, Western style set up, and have very little understanding of the cost and suffering of converts from Islam or of their responsibility to them to be their new family." The idea of new family is significant because of what family means to an easterner. If the Church's role is to be family then this brings great responsibility. Westerners use the word family but not in the same sense. Judah commented, "I became integrated straightaway, but it was a further ten years before I realised I had lost my cultural identity." He too commented on the importance of family, food and hospitality and the difference between the west and the east. For an easterner to visit a home, unannounced, is not only culturally acceptable but gives honour to their host. In the west a meeting not only requires diaries, but it is more likely that you invite a person to your home. Thus he found himself on several occasions embarrassed by the fact that he turned up on a doorstep, expecting the type of hospitality that might have been delivered by an easterner,

only to receive at best a frosty welcome. In time the MBBs learn, but it is they, not the Church that make the greatest adaptation.

Mary commented, "Post-Baptism was a crucial time for me but no one from Church was there to walk through the wilderness with me. As a newcomer I felt isolated - I felt very lonely." Despite baptism and confirmation Rebekeh concluded, "The Church did not generally provide the support. Rather it used me." Both Mary and Tony had experiences of filling in cards during Church services, expecting someone from the Church to follow up on them, only to never receive a visit or even a phone call. Again it must be stressed that coming from backgrounds where the members of a family are intimately involved with one another, this sort of "see you next Sunday" atmosphere does not fill the void. Tony too, like Mary, used the word "wilderness" and "felt let down by Christians."

Andrew, happily integrated, nevertheless commented, "I felt it would have been more appropriate for some acknowledgement that I had come from a different faith and the difficulties that brings rather than having to assimilate to a mostly white Church." Ironically his difficulty came in being assigned to an Asian cell, which had Punjabi background Christians in it. He felt let down by them, as they were not very committed, and the cell was often cancelled. He then said, "Some things the Church don't see." This is significant because it points to a sub culture dynamic going on which the main culture is oblivious to, in this case the relationships between the South Asians themselves, and their expectations. Josephine too pointed this out to me. She was bolder in saying that you simply can't trust a number of South Asians who today have prominent positions in Churches across the country. Their motives have more to do with power than Christ but the Church is unaware of this. Titus too, happily integrated, talked in terms of people from Islam coming from cultures and countries where dishonesty and corruption is so rife, and where the small Christian community may be struggling to survive, that self preservation becomes more important than spiritual growth or holiness. In this situation matters of finance become significant. The author knows of several Churches where issues of this nature, and subsequent difficulties have caused pain both to the Church and to MBBs associated with them. Barnabas too, though generally happy with the support

he received from his only Church said, “The Church has got to become aware of issues of faith, other religions, culture and race. The leaders are often ignorant and naive.”

John and Sarah commented that bickering, cliques and divisions within a Church caused them to struggle. This too is an important point. The gospel offers and promises so much that a Muslim entering into it, receiving the Holy Spirit, knowing the assurance that Christ brings, yet the cost that they have made in following him, must be easily deflated by the petty squabbling within a particular fellowship, or the more general theological differences between the many denominations. Neither the particular, nor the general, would the MBB have known about in advance. They probably see clearer than most, the things that unite Christians, rather than divide them.

Deborah felt that MBBs were asking different questions from other converts. She needed “people not to be overwhelmed by her enthusiasm. God doesn’t have to prove himself to a Muslim. He often does to a westerner.” Asking different questions from others in a group can make one appear not to fit in.

Esther experienced a different type of cultural misunderstanding. “Our pastor used to collect us from our house to nurture group. Being male this was culturally unacceptable. He was unaware of this. It would be better if a woman took this role.” Paul echoes this and goes further when stating that the whole way the Church is set up is insensitive to those from a Muslim background. “There is hypocrisy among those in Church. What they say they don’t do. What they do they don’t say.” He argued passionately that because Islam includes a social, cultural, political and also spiritual *raison d’être* when someone becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, all these aspects of life need to be included in a transformed manner. The Church rarely cares for any but the spiritual he argued. Anywhere from 70% to 90% of MBBs, he argued, return to Islam when these other aspects are not catered for. Judah too felt this figure to be around 90%. Deborah stated this same point when saying, “The totality of life must be engaged with.” When a couple are preparing to receive a new baby they prepare for it mentally, socially, emotionally, financially and in a host of other ways. This is the physical equivalent of welcoming a

spiritual new baby into the world. In the same way Paul argued if the Church wants to integrate MBBs, it must look at itself seriously and be prepared to change.

The picture of integration presented is a mixed one, some experiences being good and others less so. Issues surround it, some on the surface, some hidden. The latter, less obvious may take some time before they are realised, understood and dealt with. It is a complicated dynamic. The research is not one that could keep variables distinct, controlled and manageable such that strong conclusions can be drawn. The author does not know many of the Churches that his respondents referred to. They could be places of great vitality, in which case their comments would come with greater force. If instead they are ordinary and average it is perhaps less surprising that they struggled to cope with integrating their new believers. It is a two-way thing. The respondents themselves were aware that they came with their own cultural baggage. The difficulties are not all one sided. What is at least clear is that a greater dialogue needs to take place between the British Church and MBBs in terms of cultural sensitivity and awareness.

Various experiments are being carried out to provide half way houses of fellowship for MBBs. Andrew's Asian cell has already been mentioned. Some Churches have Asian Fellowships attached to them. The Fellowship is part of the Church, but meets separately, worships in a different language, Punjabi or Urdu perhaps, and allows for a more sensitive cultural introduction to the Christian life. Rebekeh spoke of the Asian Christian Fellowship she belonged to, mostly converts, who met fortnightly. This went on for ten years alongside her involvement with a local CE parish Church. She expressed sadness that this ended.

Unattached to traditional Churches are new fellowships sprouting up. Iranians coming to the Lord in greater numbers than other Muslims are beginning to see large congregations of their own Churches. The author knows of Iranian Churches in Birmingham, Liverpool and London. Deborah takes a major leadership role in her Fellowship. Originally attached to a local Church this fellowship is growing in its autonomy. From meeting weekly in somewhat traditional ways, with worship and a message, this fellowship has

now created its own monthly format of small group weekly meetings for Bible Study, with a monthly meeting for the entire group. In practise this is what serves the people the best and there has been freedom to experiment.

Three of the respondents came from Sanctuary, a multicultural fellowship aimed at young British Asians. Becoming part of the Emerging Church movement, Sanctuary is a major experiment in how to do Church differently in the 21st Century. With a focus on prayer and meditation, a high degree of visual and sense stimulation, little singing, space for those involved to meet with God, and food at the end of each meeting, it looks and feels very different to any other British Church.

Fellowship of Believers is narrower in its appeal than Sanctuary, focusing on Muslims. Sura 1, “Fatihah”, is a prayer Muslims recite which includes the words, “Show us the right way, the way of those on whom Thou has bestowed Thy Grace.”⁴⁴ This group, led by Paul, is a place of meeting for Muslims and MBBs alike to discuss, explore, question and be informed about the right way. Those interested in discussion have to go through a strict application and introduction process. It is only for genuinely interested parties. “The Fellowship of Believers is a group of people who have found the right way and have accepted the claims of Jesus.”⁴⁵ The group meets to help and build up MBBs in their faith; to reach out to friends and relatives of the MBBs and other enquirers by using the Gospels and testimony; it seeks to help the MBBs resolve their cultural, social and theological issues in order to strengthen their faith and walk with Jesus. Paul has links with over one hundred MBBs and others in this network, throughout Britain. The question of whether it is a Church or not is being presently debated among its leaders.

These are just a few examples of Church for MBBs. As the numbers of MBBs rise it will be necessary for new expressions of Church to emerge alongside traditional ones to give the new converts the best possible opportunity to be properly integrated into the life of the Christian Community.

⁴⁴ Sura 1 verses 6 and 7a

B. How the MBBs were discipled

The author was keen to enquire into the nature of discipleship among the MBBs. This is different to integration. Whilst Church provides the new community, family or home, discipleship speaks of the commitment of the new believer to follow Jesus. The two are often related, but they are different and should not be confused⁴⁶. The Great Commission is primarily a challenge to make disciples not members, followers not an institution. This reality is easily lost. The former has relationship and movement at its core. The latter has organisation and structure. As Mark Greene says, “His was not a convert and retain strategy, rather a train and release one. Not just a way in, but a way on. So many of our Church leaders spend so little of their time focusing on the thing that Jesus spent so much of his time focusing on. His teaching was on every aspect of life. Not for information but for transformation. Not to maintain the status quo, but to turn the world upside down.”⁴⁷ In this sense running a Church often bears little resemblance to the art of making disciples.

The author is particular sensitive to this point because he has had a long association with The Navigators, a body of people whose primary focus is to make disciples. He was keen to find out to what extent the MBBs felt discipled, what had helped them to grow, what had hindered them. Three questions were included. What was essential in helping you

⁴⁵ From the Website www.therightway.org.uk

⁴⁶ Jesus himself never planted a Church. For Church planting and growth the Acts of the Apostles and New Testament letters provide blueprints or principles. Most of the New Testament letters are written to newly established Churches. By contrast Jesus’ followers, his disciples, saw him in the eastern sense of a guru or a teacher. “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men,” he urged. The disciples were engaged in looking at, studying, watching, observing, imitating and obeying the teaching and example of Jesus. Whilst Jesus himself talked about Church and anticipated the building of it, he himself was never engaged in the practical aspect of it. Instead his was a model of teaching, training and transmitting truth, preparing the disciples for that day when he would no longer be among them. Jesus worshipped in the Temple and Synagogues of the day and spoke about the kingdom of God.

⁴⁷ I have heard Mark Greene, Director of the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, make this statement now on several occasions where he has been giving lectures on contemporary Britain, the Church, discipleship and how the West can be won for Christ. For example on Friday 21st May 2004 at the 7th Birmingham Lecture in Contemporary Christianity entitled “Getting Values to Work: Profit, Performance and Christian Values - friends or foes?”

grow in your new faith? What hindered or impeded your growth? As you look back now is there anything you would change in the way you were integrated into the Church and disciplined in your faith? The latter question acknowledges the fact that there is not always clarity between integration and discipleship.

Four principles helped the respondents to grow. The first was the help given by individual Christians. Twelve of those questionnaires stated this clearly. Tony found them inspiring. Barnabas talked in terms of “close contact.” Deborah felt “welcomed and accepted” by a few families. Esther used the phrase “Christian role models.” Paul spoke of a pastor who “spoke the same logical language.” Abraham mentioned the “genuine concern of another Christian.” Ruth talked in terms of “encouragement from my neighbour.” Josephine highlighted “my sister’s example. To this day I have not seen such faith in anyone.” Judah said, “Godly men and women surrounded me.” Lydia mentioned “support from mature Christians.” Andrew was the only person specifically to use the term “being disciplined by another.” Sarah talked in terms of opportunities given to her to talk to maturer Christians. A mixture of older Christians and peers were spoken about; the former to help ground the faith and make it understandable, to be teachers and wise advisers; the latter to share the same struggles and issues and to become friends. Especially helpful were those Christians from a similar background, South Asian or Muslim, reinforcing the help they provided. These are not casual relationships, but ones deeply committed to the welfare of the MBB. These examples model something of what Jesus did, commitment to a few deep relationships.

The second area of help surrounded the Bible and its study. Ten of the respondents mentioned this. Sarah talked about “regular Bible study”, as did Lydia and Titus. Barnabas just said “the Scriptures” and Judah said “the Bible.” Esther added to Bible study the small group discussions, which become so important. Paul mentioned the interface and comparison between the Bible and the Qu’ran which he found helpful. It should not be forgotten that for many Muslims who may not have a Bible, the Qu’ran provides a way into the life of Jesus and the Old Testament prophets, even if the accounts are a shadow. Mary talked in terms of “reading the Bible.” Andrew’s response was

fuller when he stated, “Understanding of the Bible and the word through study groups.” As well as Bible study, John talked in terms of hearing the Bible being expounded. Abraham too mentioned this latter point about hearing the Bible being preached. If we also include in this section Barnabas’ comment on “learning theology” most of which is derived from Scripture, the small group discussions mentioned by Esther, Andrew and Sarah, as well as reading Christian literature referred to by Tony, Deborah and Abraham, then it must be concluded for anyone seriously wanting to follow Jesus, a growing knowledge of the Bible is essential. “All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work,”⁴⁸ remains an outstanding statement of the influence that the Scriptures bring. Tony, not part of my ten in this section, nevertheless spoke of “various experiences backed up by Scripture”, and Josephine too talked powerfully of the “manifestation of the evidence of the word of God in my life.” Here they describe well not just a theoretical understanding, but a practical outworking of the Bible in their lives.

The third area was commitment to regular fellowship or Church. Nine of the respondents made this clear. Rebekeh just said, “Attending Church regularly.” Deborah talked about “belonging to an active and lively local Church.” Esther used the word “fellowship”, as did Ruth. Abraham added “Christian fellowship” and Judah “regular fellowship.” John spoke of “fellowship with mature Christians.” Mary preferred to talk about “being with other believers” and Titus said “regular contact with Christians.” If we include here Lydia’s comment about “good worship” usually had when Christians meet together, then we have again a consensus among the MBBs. “And let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”⁴⁹ There are no “lone rangers” in the Christian life, which is why a secret believer has such a difficult time. Knowing the communion of others on the same journey is beneficial to the MBBs.

⁴⁸ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁴⁹ Hebrews 10:24,25.

A fourth area mentioned by five of the respondents was prayer, answers to prayer and the supernatural. Barnabas simply stated “prayer”, as did Titus. Judah too used this word and added “supernatural encounters.” Mary put it in terms of “attending prayer meetings outside of my own Church.” John said “individual and corporate prayers.” If we include Esther who spoke about “her personal relationship with God” and Ruth who said “my personal time with the Lord”, then intimacy and communication with God is key. Josephine too spoke of a deep conviction of the truth of the gospel and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.” For those who seek to follow Jesus, despite much opposition, the promise of his presence and that of the Holy Spirit is both comforting and inspirational.

These then are the four areas of agreement between the respondents as to what helped them the most; individual Christians, the Bible, fellowship with other believers and prayer. To complete the picture Rebekeh mentioned baptism, Andrew the traumatic time around his first wife’s illness and Deborah talked about being taken seriously.

When it comes to what hindered them in their discipleship however there is less of a consensus and more individual responses. It becomes difficult to combine their answers. However two areas do stand out; the first is the role of the Church, and the second is the role of the individual MBB.

Six of the respondents used phrases like “pressure to be English”, “too much expectations from the Church”, “monocultural” and “lack of people from the same background”. Rebekeh, Ruth and Judah stated “misunderstanding of my Asian culture.” Paul, Judah, Rebekeh and Lydia talked in terms of “lack of love and support” and even “acceptance” from the Church. Then there were individual references unique to some. Rebekeh was encouraged by others to tell her family “too soon” about her decision to follow Jesus. John and Sarah were upset by divisions they saw in the Church. Deborah could not understand the lack of commitment from others in the Church. She struggled to see why people did not share her enthusiasm. Paul questioned the Church’s very set up as being alien to MBBs. Rebekeh struggled with the “I” style worship songs. Tony talked about

“people having strong ways of doing things but lack creativity.” John too mentioned “personality clashes.” Andrew felt let down by individuals whom he thought could help him. The respondents do not necessarily agree with one another here, and there is some disagreement between them. Whilst these hindrances have been rehearsed in the previous section, they do come again as evidence that not only is integration affected, but so too is discipleship.

The author has reflected on this. Everybody accepts the fact that there is no perfect Church or community this side of Heaven. Whilst the hope of the Gospel is that all things will be made new, perfection is never promised on earth. Little by little Christians are being changed into Christ likeness. All carry weights and burdens, which tie down and make Christians less responsive followers of Jesus. Sometimes strengths can become an Achilles’ heel. One of the major constraints, which those from a Muslim background have, is their very strong family orientation. This means that they not only have strong allegiances, but they know their place, and they know what is expected of them, and what they can expect from others. In Transactional Analysis terms there are strong parent child relationships, less good adult to adult relationships. Their upbringing is very black and white with few shades of grey. When they become followers of Jesus, it is natural that they bring this understanding of life into their new family, the Church. They are looking for a similar framework, as it is the most natural thing to do. Whilst on the one hand rejecting what they have learned for a different way, nevertheless they still bring much of that way into their Christian experience. It is at this point that they then run into difficulties, because they come into contact with fellow believers who do not share these same values, and have never had them. Not understanding or not liking what they see, theirs can become all too quickly a criticism of what is. Again this is not unusual, for it is the normality within their own families when relations do not behave as is expected of them. Titus commenting on Muslim family life summarised it as, “Conflict outside the home, competition within the home.”

Another dimension of this is the fact that within their own families individuals are not necessarily expected to take responsibility for their own lives. If in trouble other

members of the family will readily come to assistance. Western individual autonomy, founded on enlightenment thinking, has largely rid the Church of this view. If people within a fellowship are in trouble some Christian charity will be exercised to the point where they are on their feet again. The norm however is that each unit within a Church will take responsibility for its own internal governance. In these circumstances it is easy to see a potential clash of thinking between the person who thinks that the fellowship will replace their human family as the place where all their needs are met, and the autonomous unit within that Church who has no such inclination. The author is aware that these are generalisations, not specific to any one respondent, but they may go some way in trying to explain some of the hindrances, which have been mentioned.

These reflections are a bridge to the other main reason that the respondents felt hindered them, namely themselves. Ten of them commented on this in some way. It was stated in different terms. Josephine said “fear of change and lack of discipline.” Barnabas talked of “past habits and normal personal struggles.” Deborah stated “not seeing enough breakthroughs and victories in my own life.” Esther spoke of “worries” related to her parents’ relationship and their home. Tony spoke of “negative personal experiences.” Ruth commenting on the temptation to enjoy university life to the full said, “I wasn’t very strong in my faith in that I wanted to explore what the world had to offer.” For her Christianity was vying with the apparent freedom that secularisation might bring. Lydia spoke about “the fear of being found out,” and added, “no one in my Church could offer me refuge immediately if needed.” Mary, whilst saying that she refused to be hindered nevertheless admitted to “countless obstacles.” Titus spoke of his own “pride and apathy.” Sarah admitted to being tempted to “go back to Islam.”

It is therefore safe to conclude that theirs was a balanced response to the question of what had hindered them in their discipleship. Whilst some criticism was levelled at the Church, there was also a personal ownership of issues that they had and continue to have. Two respondents added individual thoughts. Josephine talked of “the pain of suffering” that she underwent as hindering her discipleship. Barnabas mentioned that because he did not change his Muslim name to a Christian one, as several of the respondents had

done, this had hindered his discipleship. Muslims would assume that he was in fact a Muslim. It is possible to interpret these final responses differently. Josephine, in undergoing some of the pain that Jesus himself suffered, is perhaps closer to her Lord than she imagines. Barnabas too, instead of being distanced from the Muslim community, by a change of name, is perhaps in a unique place to stay close to it.

When asked whether they would change anything in the way they were integrated or disciplined it is unsurprising to discover that only three respondents, Titus, Ruth and Abraham answered no. John did not answer this question. All the other twelve pointed to things that they would like to have changed. In the main these things referred back neatly to the areas of hindrances mentioned above. The idea of growth as a normal Christian expectation should not be assumed with MBBs. Josephine pointed out to me “that no such process took place”, when referring to this question. Lydia too did not feel disciplined in her early years and it was only when joining a Church away from her home town that progress for her began to be made. Here she had somebody specifically assigned to her which is a point others made strongly. Ideally this might also be an MBB, though not necessarily so. In her own words Lydia had been “completely shocked by this approach.” Deborah talked about the need to “take more responsibility for my own personal growth and walk with God and being actively disciplined in this.” Andrew would have valued more in depth study. Tony gave a picture of the ideal follow up. There must be commitment in the long run. Keep in touch regularly. Deal with the hard issues of family, community and help, and get to know, and be involved with these. Show the love of God regardless of response. Lay a seed, expecting that others may see the fruit. Don’t lose heart. It’s all about relationships. Be careful how we judge growth. In the main the respondents mentioned the sensitive cultural awareness issues already discussed at length.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

A. How the MBBs now see Islam

The author was keen to discover what the respondents thought about Islam, now that some years had passed in their own journey with Jesus. Christians have various views on Islam depending on theological positions, Biblical interpretation, historical perspective and geographical nearness. These positions can be discerned in literature produced. There are those who see Islam as fundamentally evil, the work of Satan, whose God is not the God of the Bible, and whose prime goal is to rescue people from it, and oppose it wherever it can, even to the extent of supporting military action to overcome regimes which have Islam at its centre. By contrast there are those pluralists who see all religions as leading to the same place. In their case there is nothing wrong with Islam, indeed to be a Muslim is as noble as to be a Christian. Certainly there is no need for conversion or missionary work among Muslims. They argue for the fact that all religions have at their heart the same values and the same goals. Friendly dialogue would mark their relationship with Islam.

In between these extremes would be a host of positions less easy to define, but which would give some value to Islam whilst retaining the sense that Jesus Christ and Christianity offer a better solution to the needs of the world. The respondents, having come out of Islam might give an insight into this matter. Three questions were asked. As you have grown in your new faith has your view of Islam altered in any way? If so in what way has it changed? How would you now describe your relationship with your family? The latter question gives some measure to the degree the individuals were prepared to go in order to not reject their roots completely.

In the main the respondents went through a phase of distance between themselves and Islam, immediately following their conversion. This marked a time when they were learning their new faith, and had a focus on what was different to Islam. With time, growing maturity, and renewed family contact this initial attitude when many were opposed to Islam was ameliorated. They became less aggressive. Indeed many displayed a real heart for their Muslim family or community akin to Paul's statement towards his Jewish family in Acts 10:1-4. They still concluded that Islam was flawed, but there was greater warmth in their sentiments.

Rebekeh spoke for many when she said, "Yes definitely. I am more positive about Islam, having gained more knowledge. I have more respect for my Muslim family and friends." Mary was even more positive. "Yes, sometimes I can see Christ in Muslims. Some Muslims put Christians to shame. In Islamic culture people help each other out. They are hospitable and respectful of one another. I used to see Islam as a closed door to God, but now I believe that Jesus is interceding by default on behalf of Muslims because they are searching for Him earnestly." Lydia too who felt she had developed wisdom and maturity over the years concluded, "Yes, there are many sincere believers in Islam who are deceived by Satan. They are not all bad." Ruth whilst more convinced that Islam was not the right way, nevertheless conceded to a process she had gone through. "There was a time when I disliked a lot about my background. Didn't like the men, assumed they looked down on women. After praying about it God changed my heart. Now I have more respect for the people." Paul too talked about having respect for both Muslims and Islam. "It is a historical religion. Islam has relative truth." He was keen to express the fact that Christians needed more love and more passion towards Islam. He actively tries to seek Muslims out to engage them in conversation on spiritual matters. Tony too saw the need for Christians to love Muslims. Mentioning President George Bush by name, known for his Christian views, he argued that rhetoric of his type hinders the message of love to Muslims.

Some felt more positive about Islam but still fundamentally flawed in trying to reach God. Titus illustrated this point. "The fear of Islam, its oppressive growth around the

world, and the consequences on me have been taken away. I now have greater trust in God, and a true belief that Christ will be victorious over Islam.” Helpfully he suggested that a disassociation of Islam from Muslims is important. Just as one would not want to measure Christianity and Christ by its poorer followers, so too there needs to be a separation between people whom Jesus loves, Muslims, and the system they follow Islam, which is inadequate. Barnabas argued in almost identical terms, and described Islam as “inaccessible, a bit like medieval Christianity.” Esther agreed with Titus’ point in saying, “I am less negative and fearful of Muslims then before.” She reflected on the role of the media in portraying Islam. “It’s not difficult to feel uncomfortable with Islamic values and principles. Is it about Asian culture or is it Islam itself which is oppressive?”

The inadequacy of Islam is well illustrated by what John said. “I see Islam as a human system where zeal for the unity of God lacks a divine mediator which is replaced by shrine worship, superstitious amulets, mysticism, saints and scriptures (agglomerate of half truths) and jurisprudence. It can only be seen in its true nature when you come out of it. Within Islam itself is an in built defensive mechanism which keeps you in spiritual darkness.” Andrew supports John’s point well in saying, “Yes in terms of more knowledge I can pinpoint the aspects of Islam that I was not happy with before conversion – though I could not articulate those at the time.”

Deborah took a different line. God allowed Ishmael’s line to become a great nation. Islam sees its father figure as Abraham along with his son Ishmael. Yet Ishmael was born when Abraham, at Sarah’s bidding, took matters into his own hand. So too, Deborah argued, Islam reflects Ishmael’s birth, in man’s strength, not God’s. One day she argued God will bring Ishmael’s line back to Jesus. She admitted, “I found analysing Islam threatening and confusing. I am now in a place of peace about a growing revelation of what Islam is, how to deal with it and how to help others do the same.” Josephine too thought it “crucially important for Christians to understand what Islam is and the challenge of Islam to the Church today. I always felt a fear and oppression in Islam which is prevalent in the lives of many Muslims especially women.”

Only a few saw Islam in a more negative light. Sarah whose family had tried to kill her reiterated the point. “I cannot see how my own flesh and blood could want to harm me. I never realised how fanatical Muslims were.” Abraham, married to Sarah, was equally scathing. “Islam is totally based on lies, intolerant and violent. Muslims burn with hatred within to destroy people of other faiths, and they are not honest in any way.” Judah too was strong in his language. He talked about “a greater awareness of the deception Muslims live under. How demonic it really is and the subtlety of the lies it has woven into it. They don’t follow the same God.”

None of the respondents shared the pluralistic position. It would be insulting to them to say that the cost they have incurred in following Jesus need not have happened had they only realised that Islam shared the same values and beliefs as Christianity. From their perspective the two religions do not say the same thing. There is a conviction that the truth of Christianity is fuller than in Islam. There was much talk about the deception that Muslims are under because of the Islamic system. In this they were able to separate Islam as a system from Muslims as people. Thus criticism was directed in the main towards the system, not the people.

100% of those questioned longed for better relationships with their family. Josephine put it well. “Our coming to Christ cut very deep wounds in our family. Our parents still have to live with relatives making comments and asking questions, though less so today. There has been much healing and restoration but the story is incomplete and the pain is still ongoing until our parents come to see the truth of Jesus Christ and their need of Him.” Ruth too was very frank. “It’s very special. They love me no less. They are longing for me to come back to Islam. What they don’t realise is that believing in Jesus has saved them from a lot of pain. If I wasn’t a follower of Jesus I would have been very secular and westernised. Being a believer of Jesus has helped me to lead a respectable life.” Mary too shared in a similar way. “Much better as a Christian, as I try to adhere to certain codes of conduct, like being respectful towards my mother. The love of Christ and knowing that my family are important to Him has brought me closer to them.”

Barnabas tries to serve and support his family whenever he can. A number felt like Deborah that the relationship was “good now but not close.” Esther also said the same in relationship to her father. Paul felt similarly but added, “They would still like to dictate.” This was particularly true for him, as he remains unmarried. Abraham had no contact for virtually twenty years after his decision, but then added, “Recently it has been more friendly.” This was a similar experience to his wife Sarah. Both Judah and Andrew expressed that there were “strains” in the relationship but remained part of their families. Paul and John talked about “superficiality” in the relationship. The deepest things of the heart could not be shared. Titus like Josephine and Esther had close relationships to those in the family who were followers of Jesus too.

B. Challenges for the British Church

The purpose of this work was to hear the stories of Christians in Britain who had come from a Muslim background. These form a tiny minority of those who belong to the Church. Nevertheless the author believes that there will be a greater influx of people from this background in future. Those questionnaires represent the first fruits. Fifty years ago when their parents and grandparents arrived in Britain they found a largely homogeneous society. The last fifty years has witnessed the “multiculturalisation” of this nation. For half of this period the Church was largely ignorant of and unwilling to see the mission which lay on its doorstep. Only three of my respondents were Christians before 1980. 80% have come to follow Jesus in the years since this date⁵⁰. Today, faced, as it is with the wider challenge of the need to reevangelise Britain, it has begun to see this opportunity too. Mission has become an important word again in the British Christian consciousness. So what are the main challenges and conclusions that this study can draw?

First and foremost is the need to listen to the stories themselves. It was with deliberate intent that the word “voices” appeared in the title. Voices need listening to. Nick Pollard’s approach in his book, *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult*, is summarised by Phil Jackman⁵¹. Pollard appeals for what he calls, “positive deconstructionism.” This is the ability to step into a friend’s value system, walking around it with him. It requires listening, patience and empathy. Understanding where it comes from and what it is based on may then allow you to question its foundation and its inevitable inconsistency. In time the friend whose system you have deconstructed may be willing to step into yours based on Jesus. You then need to allow him to live in your system, explaining your story, Jesus’ story, and allowing him to evaluate your system of belief. Eventually he may conclude that your system is more consistent than his and be willing to join you in faith. This approach does not try to produce evidence upon evidence as Modernity may have

⁵⁰ In a similar study Des Harper reported a similar growing momentum among Muslims turning to faith in Jesus Christ. See *Why South Asians in Britain Come to Christ: Factors in the Conversion to Christ of People of Other Faiths* p30

⁵¹ Phil Jackman: *Reaching out to a Post Modern Generation* p8

insisted upon, rather friendship, trust and mutual respect allowing friends to tell their equally valid stories. People should not be exploited or manipulated in this approach. We should not think of ourselves as being socially or even spiritually superior. Acceptance is a key notion. Whilst Nick Pollard's focus is evangelism, the cultural differences we have identified in this work are sufficiently great for the author to challenge the British Church to listen and listen well to those who have come from a Muslim background. The richness of their cultural background may bring much positive blessing to the Church if tapped into wisely.

Second it is possible for people from Muslim backgrounds to become followers of Jesus. This is an encouragement because never in the Muslim setting have the number of conversions been large. Gordon Nickel argues in *Peaceable Witness among Muslims*⁵² that some Christians are embarrassed about conversion. It might be that they have a guilt complex about mission itself, or that they have a loss in confidence about the gospel or both. He cites three false assumptions about conversion. First that conversion is the same as coercion. Second that conversion is the work of human beings. Third that all change within a culture is bad, and that the status quo must be preserved at all costs. By contrast he argues that conversion is God's call and it is God's power that does it. Do Muslims, religiously pious people need converting? He argues that outward experiences of piety do not necessarily correspond to the heart. That religiousness does not lead to virtuousness. That Jesus was hardest on the religious leaders who were convinced of the truth of their position. That Paul, the most religious of people needed converting. Illustrating this from the testimony of a devout Pakistani Muslim, Mohammed Daud Rahbar, Nickel says, "For him, Daud, the great Muslim obligation to 'Let God be God' meant to see God in Christ reconciling the world to himself."⁵³ He goes on to say, "When theological or religious systems forbid people to see God in Christ crucified, writes Cragg, then conversion is 'necessary and right.'"⁵⁴ The challenge to the British Church is

⁵² Gordon D. Nickel: *Peaceable Witness among Muslims*. The arguments above are largely taken from Chapter 3 entitled "Conversion from Islam to Christ."

⁵³ *Ibid* p44

⁵⁴ *Ibid* p44

that conversion from Islam is possible and necessary. God in Christ is at work calling Muslims to follow Him.

Third, Christians in Britain should not be afraid of Islam, rather they should seek to know and understand it better than they do at the moment. This was the plea from many in my survey. It is not difficult to get hold of literature related to Islam. Simple booklets exist such as *Christianity and Other Faiths an Evangelical Contribution to our Multi-Faith Society*, *Jesus through Other Eyes: Christology in Multi-Faith Britain*, *Love Your Muslim Neighbour* and *Salaam Alekum Understanding Muslim Culture*. For those who want more information books such as *Ishmael My Brother*, *Islam in Conflict*, *The World's Religions A Lion Handbook*, *Friendship First The Manuel* and *How to Understand Islam* all provide a rich source of information related to the history, beliefs, practices and current trends within Islam. For those who want even more detailed information books like, *The Gospel and Islam a Compendium*, *Muslims and Christians at the Table*, *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God* and *The Unseen Face of Islam* all seek to take those who want to know right into the heart of Islamic thought itself. Then there are books written by Muslims themselves promoting their own faith. *From My Sisters' Lips* is a book written by an African lady who has become a Muslim celebrating Muslim womanhood.

Better still is actually meeting and befriending of Muslims. The author has been privileged to know a number of Muslim men and women whose conversation has illuminated his own thinking greatly when it comes to understanding this religion. Finding out about another's religion invariably draws one closer, breaks down barriers and stereotypes and develops understanding. In the context of a Church meeting it is possible for a Muslim to be invited to share about his or her faith, and to be shown hospitality by the Church. Likewise Muslims will be ready to greet visits of Christian to their Mosques, and the author has experienced this hospitality firsthand. The challenge to the British Church is to find out more about Islam, so that it is informed, knowledgeable and confident, rather than misinformed, ignorant and fearful.

Fourth the Church should be prepared to experiment with its own forms to provide more suitable places of fellowship for Muslim followers of Jesus.

“In Christendom, questions about Church required examination of neither culture nor mission. Church was primary; culture was a friendly, hospitable environment shaped by the story the Church told. There were many discussions about Church – doctrine, liturgy, authority, sacraments, ministry, architecture and pastoral theology – but cultural exegesis and reflection on mission did not shape developments. But the self-confidence of a dominant social institution expecting culture to adapt to the Church is waning. Christians in all traditions are asking searching questions about the shape and focus of Church; most are thinking deeply about the cultural context and many are starting with the mission imperative. The language of ‘new ways of being Church’ and ‘emerging Church’ is popular – evidence that Christendom is fading.”⁵⁵

So speaks Stuart Murray-Williams as he reflects on recent developments, and the issues related to the Church being on the margins of society not at its centre. This marginalisation can be traced over several hundred years, particularly from the Enlightenment paradigm of the 18th Century onwards, which became supreme at the turn of the 20th century. Whilst 70% of people in the 2001 census reported being Christian, this is as much a memory for many as it is a living experience. He goes on, “Recognition of a yawning cultural chasm between church and contemporary culture hinders movement in either direction. Church members struggle to bridge the gap at work or relaxing with friends; many know their friends will find Church incomprehensible, irrelevant, archaic or twee. Realisation that unitary Christendom culture has given way to the plural sub-cultures of post-Christendom. Inherited forms of church are attractive only to certain sub-cultures (especially white, middle-class, educated and middle aged conformists) and are ineffective in mission beyond these.”⁵⁶ He recognises that some are

⁵⁵ Stuart Murray – Williams: *Emerging Churches in Post-Christendom*. Posted on www.emergingchurch.info 9/3/05

⁵⁶ Stuart Murray – Williams: *Emerging Churches in Post-Christendom*. Posted on www.emergingchurch.info 9/3/05

already pioneering new forms of church among sub-cultures. The challenge to the British Church is to not only embrace these developments, but to welcome any initiatives where MBBs are made to feel more welcome, accepted, loved and can worship God in styles more suitable to their own background and culture. In some cases it may be traditional Churches that embark on creating these fellowships. In other cases it may be those outside of present structures that have to take the initiative themselves. Although there was little alternative for those first converts of the 1970s to join Churches which were culturally insensitive, there should be fewer reasons for MBBs to feel uncomfortable in their place of belonging today.

Fifth the Church needs to see the imperative of making disciples among MBBs. The goal is not conversion. The goal is maturity in Christ. The majority of literature still has the aim of evangelism, as though this is a satisfactory outcome. Whilst the author admits this an extremely noble ambition it falls short of Jesus' aim. "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect."⁵⁷ It also falls short of Paul's aim. "Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man that we may present every man mature in Christ."⁵⁸ The word translated perfect in Matt 5:48 and mature in Col 1:28 is the same Greek word, *teleios*. Other ways of translating it might have included, "having reached its end", "finished", "complete" or "fully grown"⁵⁹. When Jesus says, "A student is not above his teacher but every one who is fully trained will be like his teacher,"⁶⁰ he uses the Greek word *katartizo*. This too has the idea of perfection in the sense of "to render fit", "complete", as when the nets of the fishermen need mending before they are used again, "restored". "It signifies right ordering and arrangement...it points out the path of progress...It indicates the close relationship between character and destiny...prepared...to supply what is lacking...fit."⁶¹ The idea of process is contained in all these words, not just a process that culminates in conversion to Christ, but one that has as its goal consummation and fulfilment. Jesus' challenge to the disciples in Matt

⁵⁷ Matthew 5:48

⁵⁸ Colossians 1:28

⁵⁹ W.E.Vine: *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* p174

⁶⁰ Luke 6:40

⁶¹ W.E.Vine: *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* p175

9:36ff that the “harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few”, and Paul’s challenge to Timothy, his right hand man, in 2Tim 2:15 to “present himself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth”, both suggest the possibility of being a Christian, but not a worker, or a Christian, but not one who rightly handles God’s word. Equally when Jesus talks to Nicodemus in John 3 about the need to be born again, there is the idea that this would be a start of a new life, with growth as its main theme. Hebrews and James both pick up on this infant analogy. The challenge to the British Church is not simply to aim for converts but to aim for mature disciples of Jesus who can feed themselves, instruct others, work in the harvest field of Britain, and be an asset not a hindrance to the Kingdom of God.

Bibliography

- Abdul-Haqq, Abdiyah Akbar *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim*
Bethany House, Minneapolis, 1980
- Bell, Steve *Friendship First The Manuel*
Ordinary Christians discussing good news with
ordinary Muslims
Friendship First Publications, London, 2003
- Bible References. *The Holy Bible, New International Version*
International Bible Society, 1973
- Carey College *Islamic Study Course Series*
Carey College, 1991
- Chapman, Colin *Cross and Crescent*
IVP, Leicester, England, 1995
- Christensen, Jens *The Practical Approach to Muslims*
North Africa Mission, Marseille, 1977
- Cooper, Anne *Ishmael My Brother*
MARC, STL, EMA, Great Britain, 1985
- Copleston, F.S. *Christ or Mohammed? The Bible or The Koran?*
Nuprint Ltd, Harpenden, Herts, 1989
- Dudley Woodberry, J. (Ed) *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*
MARC, California, 1989
- E.A. Working Party *Christianity and Other Faiths an Evangelical*
Contribution to our Multi-Faith Society
Evangelical Alliance, Paternoster Press, Exeter,
1983
- Gaudeul, Jean-Marie *Called from Islam to Christ*
Monarch Books, Crowborough, East Sussex, 1999
- Guder, D.L. *Missional Church*
W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998
- Harper, Des *Why South Asians in Britain Come to Christ:*
Factors in the Conversion to Christ of People of
Other Faiths

- MA Thesis, All Nations Christian College, Herts, England, 2004
- Hooker, R. and Lamb, C. *Love The Stranger*
SPCK, London, 1986
- Iloff, Frances *Salaam Alekum Understanding Muslim Culture*
Interserve, London, 1995
- Jabbour, Nabeel *The Rumbling Volcano – Islamic
Fundamentalism in Egypt*
Mandate Press, Pasadena, California, 1993
- Jackman, Phil *Reaching out to a Post Modern Generation*
Lecture delivered at 2nd Midland Christian
Resources Exhibition, Birmingham, 1998
- Jewels in his Crown *Belonging, Believing, Behaving
British Asian Discipleship in the 21st Century*
Asian Ministries Conference, Cliff College,
Sheffield, 2000
- Johnstone, P. *Operation World*
OM Publishing, Carlisle, 1993
- Jomier, Jacques *How to Understand Islam*
SCM Press, London, 1989
- Lamb, C.A. *Jesus through Other Eyes: Christology in Multi-
Faith Britain*
Latimer Studies 14, Latimer House, Oxford, 1982
- Lion Handbook. *The History of Christianity*
Lion Publishing, Herts.UK, 1977
- Lion Handbook *The World's Religions*
Lion Publishing, Herts.UK, 1994
- Love, R. *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God*
William Carey Library, Pasadena, 2000
- Martin, John *Love Your Muslim Neighbour*
Echoes of Service, Bath, England, 2000
- Masood, Steven *Into the Light – A Young Muslim's Search for
Truth.*

- STL, Kingsway, Eastbourne, 1986
- Matheny, Tim *Reaching the Arabs*
William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, 1981
- McCurry, Don M. (Ed) *The Gospel and Islam: A Compendium*
MARC, California, 1979
- McDowell, B.A. and Zaka, A. *Muslims and Christians at the Table*
P&R Publishing, New Jersey, 1999
- McManners, J. *The Oxford History of Christianity*
Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990
- Miller, William M. *Ten Muslims Meet Christ*
W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1969
- Miller, William M *A Christian's Response to Islam*
Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, East Sussex,
1986
- Musk, Bill *The Unseen Face of Islam*
MARC, California, 1989
- Neil, S. *A History of Christian Missions*
Penguin Books, Middlesex, England, 1986
- Nickel, Gordon D. *Peaceable Witness Among Muslims*
Herald Press, Pennsylvania, 1999
- Nielsen, Jorgen *Muslims in Western Europe*
Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992
- Riddell, P.G. and Cotterell, P. *Islam in Conflict*
IVP, Leicester, England, 2003
- Robert, Na'ima B. *From My Sister's Lips*
Bantam Books, London, 2005
- Robinson, M. *To Win The West*
Monarch, Crowborough, 1996
- Sheikh, Bilquis *I Dared to Call Him Father*
Word, Waco, Texas, 1980
- Sookhdeo, Patrick *Asians in Britain*

- Paternoster press, Exeter, 1977
- Sutcliffe, Sally *Good News for Asians in Britain*
Grove Books, Cambridge, 1998
- Syrjanen, Seppo *In Search of Meaning and Identity*
Finnish Society for Missiology and Ecumenics,
Helsinki, 1984
- Tiplady, R (Ed) *Postmission (World Mission by a Postmodern
Generation)*
Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2002
- Walsh, B.J. and Middleton, J.R. *The Transforming Vision*
IVP, Illinois, 1984
- Winter, R.D. and Hawthorne, S.C. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*
William Carey Library, Pasadena, California, 1999
- Yusuf Ali, Abdullah *The Meaning of the Glorious Qu'ran*
Nadim & Co, London, 1975
- Zacharias, Ravi *Jesus Among Other Gods*
Word publishing, Nashville, 2000

Appendix 1

Questionnaire - Voices from Christians in Britain with a Muslim Background.

Stories for the British Church on evangelism, conversion, integration and discipleship.

Please answer the following questionnaire in preparation for our meeting together. I look forward to discussing this with you. Thank you so much for being willing to take part.

Preliminaries

Age Group	Under 30	30 – 50	Over 50	
Sex	Male	Female		
Marital status	Single	Married	Separated	Widowed
Ethnic background				
Muslim background	Shia	Sunni	Sufi	Other

How long have you been a Christian?

Evangelism and Conversion

Jot down the main points and defining moments in how you heard the gospel up to the point of decision.

How long would you say this process took?

What 3 factors most strongly influenced your decision to follow Jesus?

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆

Briefly describe your own reaction to becoming a Christian.

Were you given any advice or help in how to communicate with your family about your decision?

What time gap existed between choosing to follow Jesus and informing your family of that decision?

Do all in your extended family know that you are a Christian?

Briefly describe any reaction they had upon knowing that you were a Christian.

Integration and Discipleship

At the point of deciding to follow Jesus did you have any Church contact?

What was your concept of the Church at the point of deciding to follow Jesus? Did you see it favourably or unfavourably?

What were your own expectations of the Church (if any) at this time?

What were the expectations of those in the Church about you (if any) at this time?

Jot down something of the process which took place in you becoming an active member of the Church. What sorts of timings were involved here? Was it a smooth steady process?

1. Participation infrequently.
2. Regular participation.
3. Baptism and public commitment or membership.
4. A leadership role in the Christian community.

How long did it take before you felt integrated into the life of the Church?

How many Churches have you been a member of over the years?

What was essential in helping you grow in your new faith? (List just the most critical)

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆

What hindered or impeded your growth? (List any that really set you back)

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆

As you look back now is there anything you would change in the way you were integrated into the Church and disciplined in your faith?

Islam Revisited

As you have grown in your new faith has your view of Islam altered in any way?

If so in what way has it changed?

How would you now describe your relationship with your family?