

CONVERTS AND MARTYRS – January 1995

by Shirley W. Madany

How often we regret our need to be circumspect when talking about converts from Islam to Christianity. We report so carefully that they can be found in all of the "closed" Islamic countries. Or we may get more specific and say that we are speaking for a convert living in Morocco, or Algeria, or Tunisia, or more vaguely in North Africa.

On the reverse side, we point out that converts from Christianity to Islam are increasing in the Western world and they are acclaimed publicly. Some retain their Western names, such as a Dr. Jeffry Lang, a Math professor whose lecture in New York on "Racism in America" was advertised in the Islamic Audio, Video & Computer catalog called SOUND VISION. Others change their names completely taking on a Muslim flavor. One of the best known is a British rap singer who is now known as "Yusuf Islam." He is extremely active in his Muslim zeal--running a Muslim school for children in London, England and developing songs and videos also for children.

It was shocking, therefore to read the following news item in the December 1994 issue of First Things, a monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life:

"In some parts of the world Christians are still being crucified, quite literally so. News agencies report that five Christians have been crucified since July in Sudan, one being an Anglican priest. The detail is supplied that the executioners used six-inch-long nails. In Wad Medani two Catholic converts have been sentenced by an Islamic law court to be crucified. Anglican Bishop Daniel Zindo reports that widows and orphans of slain Christian men are sold into slavery in north Sudan and Libya for \$15 per slave. Such behavior does put a strain on hopes for better Christian-Muslim relations."

A few months ago the Christian world was shaken with the news of the deaths of Mehdi Dibaj and Bishop Haik Hovsepian-Mehr, both well known Iranian pastors. Following those two murders we now learn of the death of a well known Presbyterian Church leader, Rev. Tateos Michaelian, who was elected to be chairman of the Council of Protestant Ministers in Iran, in the place of Bishop Hovsepian. But Iran and Sudan are not the only Islamic countries where one finds modern-day martyrs.

In the light of this world-wide setting, consider the following translation of a beautiful letter received from a convert from Islam to Christianity, presently living in Syria, one of the most repressive countries of the Middle East:

Dear Sir, in charge of Saatu'l Islah.

Greetings from the heart of a person thirsting for faith and knowledge. Knowledge which will bring me into a faith which I can truly adhere to. I consider myself as one of your students, having been listening to your broadcasts for several years. You may even remember that I did get in touch with you in the past and I received some of your publications. Early in the morning, I listen to your daily ministry which instructs us in the

teachings of the Holy Bible. In fact today, I was listening to Bible Study No. 297. I felt such a strong urge to write to you right away and plead with you to take my words seriously. I have so many questions about life and I do want to receive a copy of your TEACHINGS OF THE HOLY BIBLE, if that is possible.

My problem is the following: I am a person who belongs to a belief system and to a religion inherited from my forefathers. I have never chosen it. For years and years I have been leading a life of perplexity and a quest for truth. I don't find people applying the truth they claim to believe. I had almost reached a point of despair when God led me to hear the story of the Messiah which brought peace to my mind. My conviction grew and grew that the person of the Messiah was no ordinary person, his humanity was not like the other humans. For the past ten years, I have been searching but never daring to ask anyone about this subject due to my circumstances, and the atmosphere in which I live and the nature of my work. I did finally manage to get a copy of the Holy Bible and appreciated its spiritual content. But there were so many things in it which I could not understand.

Then it was the will of God which guided me to listen to these religious programs over the radio, including the ones broadcast on Trans World Radio. So I began to correspond with these broadcasts, and some responded to my requests while others did not. I did not despair since I was at the peak of my thirst for the truth, for objective truth. I had to do all this in a quiet manner as I did not want to hurt those close to me who might misunderstand my motives and goals. So my only way was to write to people who would keep confidence.

Now I can share with you the fact that as I approach my sixtieth year, my heart has been filled with faith in the Messiah whose love has taken root within my spirit. I am now convinced of his greatness, holiness and heavenly glory. Now I understand in a deep way what the Cross symbolizes; it is a bridge which helps us to reach the Heavenly Father and the true meaning of the redemption which He has wrought--a redemption from a world of sin and with the final goal of securing life eternal.

Now I don't want to write too long an epistle, but my question is: how can a person like me, having reached the conclusions mentioned above, how can I really receive the blessing of the Lord Jesus and be saved from my former life and be renewed spiritually? How can I be emancipated from the evils and hypocrisies of this world? What must I do now, having truthfully arrived at self-denial and at preferring the love of the Holy Messiah alone? Is such faith enough, is it adequate all by itself? Or is one supposed to continue on a path in order that his physical and spiritual behavior may be harmonious? (The writer would appear to be struggling with sanctification, or the balance between faith and works)

You must have realized by now that I am a person who is seeking help and I expect you to lend me your hand before the hour of my departure from this perishing world. I would like to say though that I have been renewed in the Messiah for life eternal. I would like to assure you that my life has been changed, renewed, in the Messiah. I have been reading

the Holy Bible in a serious manner and have been able to understand what was not possible for me to understand in the past. I have studied and lived through THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES and have absorbed the epistles of Saint Paul. I have reached a stage in which my own study of the Bible is no longer sufficient. I need to know the practical aspect of my faith in order that my faith in our Lord Jesus may be authentic and in order that I may truly deserve his love. Please help me as I have come to this religious renewal from another world, totally different from my new world. I believe that your publications would help me to grow in my faith.

You may wonder, why I don't ask someone from my own country. I really don't know where to go and which church to ask! How can I be regarded as a true believer? People will always be suspicious of me. I am now 60 years old, please help me.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon. Please pray for me, and may God bless your efforts as you spread His word and feed the souls of believers. Thanks for your concern.

Dear readers of this article. There are hundreds of such converts who are painfully aware that to make public their decision to follow Christ, is to court martyrdom. Certainly we are humbled by the shining example of their faith which demonstrates that they consider martyrdom a small price for the gift of eternal life. While there seems to be little that we can do for them at the moment, to secure the right to make such a decision to follow Christ, and while we rejoice that the number of saints in heaven is increasing, just as surely as the number of Muslims on earth is growing numerically, let us make sure that they are not forgotten. In the early days of Christianity there was a saying that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."