

# NEW APPROACHES TO MINISTRY TO MUSLIMS (MTM)

Paper presented by Vivienne Stacey to “Q 82”,  
the 1982 Quadrennial Conference of BMMF International

## **Introduction**

### **Increasing interest in and concern for Muslims among Christians in general.**

*“For everything its season, and for every activity under heaven its time.” Ecclesiastes 3 verse 1 (NEB)*

Christians are waking out of a long sleep to realise their responsibility to share the gospel with Muslims. The evidence that this is God’s time for revealing His Son to Muslims has come in many ways:

- repentance by Christians for wrong attitudes to Muslims in the past
- persistent praying for Muslims by individuals, in groups and in churches
- The increasing number of Christians constrained by the love of Christ to make Him known among Muslims
- The supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in Muslim hearts through dreams and visions
- The dispersion of unprecedented numbers of Christians of many nations in the oil lands of the Middle East and the dispersion of many Muslim guest workers and students in the West
- The information through the mass media of critical events in Iran and Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Egypt, in Pakistan and Bangladesh and in other parts of the Muslim world.

### **Increasing interest in and concern for Muslims in BMMF in particular**

In the last half of the nineteenth century and in the earlier part of this century BMMF (ZBMM) was heavily involved in MTM among women and children. MTM is, therefore, not something new in our history. However, BMMF personnel accustomed to undivided British India were slow to realise the significance of the creation of a sovereign state in the name of Islam – Pakistan. Nor was the opportunity among the largest Muslim community in the world – the then 40 million Muslims left in India – understood. Things could never be the same again after the midnight partition of 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> August 1947. Nevertheless, pioneer opportunities to work in Central Asia with IAM were readily taken up in a totally Muslim land. Lebanon and Iran also became lands of our concern, Lebanon being seen as a springboard to the Middle East. The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 and its refugee challenge involved us in another predominantly Muslim land. Now the Gulf States and Egypt have become areas of operation for us. That the Muslim world is so different from Hindu or secular India took a long time to assimilate. However, the 1974 and 1978 Quadrennial Conferences meeting first in Pakistan and then in India highlighted the singularity and particularity of the Muslim world and the need for especially trained personnel with a call to work with Muslims. BMMF’s fairly large involvement in

Pakistan was mainly with Christian, Hindu and tribal communities, not with the 97% majority Muslim community. In 1978 policy and action came together in the setting up by the International Council of a standing commission called the Commission on MTM. [DC] was appointed its convenor. Its first meeting took place in Lahore. In 1979 it met in Bombay with Vivienne Stacey as D' successor after his retirement. In 1980 the annual meeting was in Dacca and the 1981 meeting was held in Karachi last October. The Commission meets in different locations which have particular relevance to its work and can thus more easily consult locals both national and expatriate as it did particularly in Bangladesh and Karachi.

### **The MTM Commission: What it is**

The MTM Commission has six to eight members. The guidelines for the Commission are laid out in the Manual of Administration (28a). They can be summarised as follows:

- a,b require the sharing of information and study materials
- c,d encourage recommendations regarding policy and deployment of personnel in the field of MTM
- e,i envisage a supportive fellowship of those engaged in MTM and recommendations of suitable courses for initial and continuing orientation
- f encourages all members of BMMF to grasp opportunities for MTM
- g,h urge those in MTM to be integrated with and to continue in fellowship with the church, and newcomers to link with more experienced national and expatriate workers in this ministry
- j calls for guidelines for National Councils regarding the judicious use of publicity materials for MTM

### **Some significant suggestions arising from the MTM Commission prayer and think tank**

#### **1. Facilitating the forming of cell groups of M converts**

More emphasis has been given to evangelism among Muslims than to nurturing those who have responded to evangelism and come to Christ. The slow steady work of nurturing and teaching is crucial if converts are to multiply themselves and become integrated into existing churches and/or to form new churches. A brief study of the situation in four large cities in the sub-continent made it obvious that there were at least twelve to twenty M converts to be found in each city who were not linked with churches in any definite way. Some of these individuals were not linked with regular fellowship groups of any kind. While it is not the function of BMMF International to establish M convert churches (these presumably would be established by the converts themselves) it is the function of some members of BMMF Int. to facilitate the establishment of cell groups of M converts without pre-determining whether these cell groups should link with an existing church or eventually start a congregation of its own either within the community of Islam or outside it.

In such cell groups converts will learn to accept each other and to develop culturally appropriate forms of worship and witness. As [JT] points out in a paper written for the MTM Commission and entitled *Biblical Perspective on a M Church*:

“... it seems that in this situation the most consistent application from *Galatians* would be geared towards westernised Christians rather than the M convert. *Galatians* was written to Gentile Christians, a minority group of the Christian Church in at least leadership and influence if not in numbers. Jewish Christians (the majority group) were trying to get this new body to conform to Jewish laws. Thus the dominant Christian group was trying to impose its culture on the new, minority group. Paul vigorously opposes this and labels it an addition to the Gospel. The obvious application for today is not from Muslim to Muslim convert, but rather western Christian to Muslim convert. We are the dominant Christian group and they the minority. Perhaps we are imposing our culture more than we realise.”

In the sub-continent the national churches with their sub-cultures face the same challenge.

The facilitating of cell groups would involve some members of BMMF Int.. These members would concentrate on certain cities and link with others, both national and expatriate, engaged in a similar discipling ministry in these cities. This is envisaged as team-work, though not necessarily with a structured team or leader. An individual or couple might work in several such enterprises, grouping with different people in each, or they might concentrate on one. (*AEC 42/81a*). To quote from the last MTM Commission report (October 1981):

“MTM begins not with organised projects and structures but with individuals and families whom the Lord has been preparing for this ministry, and to whom He has given the spiritual gifts of evangelism, discerning spirits, counselling, teaching and pastoral care. [...] In the developing of such ministries of evangelism and church discipling some members will be full time, but perhaps the majority of members will have other ministries which are directly related, such as being part-time staff of correspondence schools, or TEE or Seminary programmes, or as IFES related workers. This may be necessary for visa purposes or to allay undue suspicion as to our ministry. Language mastery should be a prerequisite for such ministries and prior experience in church-related ministries highly desirable, although service in health-care or relief and development may be the Lord’s way of preparing the worker for a church discipling ministry. A biblically authenticated life style, godly living, love and compassion for all, and generosity in giving and receiving hospitality are some of the qualities for this type of ministry. In discussing the Lord’s appointed place of ministry and placement of personnel, adequate and prior surveys are needed of where responsive peoples live, where converts reside and work, locating enquirers challenged through radio and correspondence programmes, and consulting with church leaders who would welcome such ministries in their parishes or areas of work. Priority would normally be given to areas where there is no church witness. The immediate goal will normally be to work with converts and enquirers for the purpose of worship, fellowship and mutual encouragement, and for instruction in doctrine and practice through Bible study and use of TEE and correspondence course materials. Such cell groups, normally meeting in homes, should be encouraged to meet regularly, possibly weekly or more often. [...] We note that there are at least four possible avenues for church discipling of Muslims:

1. to work under and with the existing churches
2. to help establish individual congregations in areas where a team for church discipling resides
3. to help establish one central congregation for M converts
4. to help establish cell groups throughout the city.

None of these avenues is seen as incompatible with another but we suggest that numbers 1 & 4 are the most strategic, ie to work within the church and to establish cell groups. A BMMF Int. worker could within one avenue or the other, or both. Those who work within the church will have the responsibility of endeavouring to removed the obstacles in the church to outreach to Muslims. Also they will seek to encourage those who are working among Muslims to take and seek an active role in accepting and integrating M converts in the church, and where appropriate channelling them into cell groups.”

### **Publicity and MTM**

Ministry and publicity are closely related as the records of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ show. In Matthew 8 verse 4 Jesus says to the leper whom He had touched and healed “See that you say nothing to anyone . . .”. The command to silence implied the possibility of excitement and acclaim, which Jesus wished to minimise. In Matthew 16 verse 20, after Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus “strictly charged the disciples to tell no-one that he was the Christ.” The strict charge to silence was obeyed. The time had not yet come for a full and public confession. At that point it would have been bad strategy.

[BM] in a very helpful paper on *Implications for MTM of the self-disclosure of Jesus* writes:

“Reading the Gospel of Mark at one sitting, one cannot but be impressed by the number of times Jesus enjoins secrecy on those who glimpse a bit of his glory. Why so? Patently not in the hope that they will perversely shout it all the more; rather that broadcasting such a radical truth so inimical to Jewish understanding of God will cause more opposition from misunderstanding than from antipathy to the truth of the good news. Most of the injunctions to secrecy occur at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry (Mark 1 verses 34,44; 3 verse 12; 5 verse 43; 7 verse 36; 8 verse 26,30). In some cases it follows the revelation of supernatural knowledge of Jesus’ deity, either from demons (1 verse 34; 3 verse 12) or from God (8 verse 30) which could not be adequately understood by the people around Jesus (as was seen by Peter’s becoming an instrument of Satan – 8 verse 33) and therefore called for Jesus’ command for non-communication. A parallel example was the raising of the young girl (5 verse 37ff) which was observed by only a select few but which demonstrated Jesus’ messianic mastery over death and therefore called for “strict orders not to everyone know about this” (5 verse 43, NIV). There possibly was an element of simple humility or perhaps a desire that miraculous healings not supersede his preaching ministry (1 verses 43ff). Jesus took the deaf and dumb man (7 verse 33) and then the blind man (8 v23) apart from the crowds before he healed them and then after he had healed them he commanded them to remain

silent about the matter and tell no one. At least one of them disobeyed (7 verse 36) as did the man who had been cured of leprosy earlier in Jesus' ministry (1 verses 43ff) with unfortunate results. We too easily applaud boldness in witness, but when it occurred in direct disobedience to Jesus' command it resulted in a severe limitation of Jesus' freedom to minister in the urban centres. Thus, whether for motives of humility, a desire to maintain a freedom to witness in the long term, or to avoid unnecessarily giving Muslims "spiritual indigestion" by broadcasting the spread of the good news, we do well to observe a judicious silence about the results from our ministries (to friends back home) and the exclusive claims of Christ (to Muslim friends)."

*(Eccl 3 v7)*

In the light of these thoughts, let us ask ourselves wherever we serve and live:

1. Are our traditions about publicity superseding Scripture in any way?
2. Are all media appropriate at all times for publicity purposes?
3. What is the purpose of publicity when it seems counter-productive, hindering the ministry it is meant to promote?
4. Should we take the risk of endangering by our publicity M converts who have often already suffered so much in following Christ and thereby possibly hinder the one thing that could help them most – the spread of the gospel among their own people?
5. Are we, like many in this computer and success-oriented age, obsessed with numbers? Numbers can so easily be wrong, as God told Elijah ( I Kings 19 verse 18).
6. MTM has become an "in thing". Will we be swept along copying the evangelical empire builders or can we work quietly, discreetly and humbly?
7. Are we more concerned with the primacy of evangelism rather than the primacy of obedience?
8. Is our publicity provoking confrontation?

If anyone has any doubt about how thoroughly our materials are studied he should read the article in the Muslim fortnightly paper *Impact International* for 28<sup>th</sup> June 1981 on "Enter the Tentmaker" by Ahmad Abu Sulaiman.

An operation which is to be low key obviously calls for little publicity. Yeast permeating, affecting the whole lump, unobtrusive, not easily identified, no obvious threat to structures or power bases, has parabolic significance for MTM.

### **3. Recruitment and Training for MTM**

This subject has featured often in our Commission deliberations. Here I quote Dr [RW] writing on the selection of candidates in a letter to National Directors and Personnel Secretaries dated 16<sup>th</sup> October 1979:

"We accept the fact that MTM involvement makes special demands on personnel, which demand is increased by the fact that most such people will be involved in 'independent' ministries rather than institutional. This calls for considerable inner resources, and a deep sense of personal security in the Lord and in the Fellowship.

Accordingly AEC recommends for your attention the following resolution of the MTM Commission:

*We URGE National Councils to give careful attention to the screening of candidates coming to MTM with regard to:*

- *their love and commitment to Christ as Saviour and Lord*
- *their belief and awareness of the miraculous power of God in the salvation of the whole person*
- *their call to overseas service and to BMMF Int.*
- *their call to MTM”*

There is not space here to treat this subject as it deserves but I want to draw attention to the following:

1. The need for MTM personnel to learn to minister to each other and to develop strong fellowship bonds.
2. The need for MTM personnel to consider all training courses as events in a lifelong process of learning and discipling, bearing in mind that priority should be given to direct contact with Muslims.
3. The importance of the study of Marxism and its relation to Islam.
4. Our need to recruit a few who will become scholars in the field of Islamics.
5. “Our Western background has influenced not only those of us who come from the West or have been trained in the West but that it has influenced most of the Christian Seminary training in the sub-continent. These seminaries generally include little teaching on practical dealings with folk Islam, power encounters and the supernatural, especially where these matters relate to actual spiritual warfare. Often evangelism is taught as a logical presentation of a series of facts, and Christ’s methods of story telling, real-life examples and power encounters have little place.” (MTM Seminar report October 1981)
6. Our need to define “tentmaker”. Dr Christy Wilson says there are twelve definitions. Should we not look at the life and ministry of Paul as we make our definition? Writing of areas where the traditional missionary cannot work, and thinking particularly of North Africa, Greg Livingstone writes in *Muslim World Pulse* (August 1981):

*“The strategy is to believe God for a 15 to 20 hours a week job that will both obtain a resident’s visa and will be conducive for a church-planting ministry by pooling one’s gifts with others in the same city. Therefore missions need to recruit people who have primarily a vision for church planting, not only a job overseas to practise “presence evangelism”. The need is for unstoppable who will not give up, but will continue to ask and seek and knock until they find the right kind of entrance. Finally, it is not enough to get people into a country, they must be coached. We must have both the coordinators for the offense (strategies) and coordinators for the defense (problem solvers and pastoral counselling) – middle management to keep people working together to accomplish the main objectives: the planting of fully-fledged nationally-sustained churches.”*

We may not fully agree with Greg Livingstone but we should listen carefully to what he says as the North Africa Mission has much experience.

#### **4 New countries eg Algeria**

BMMF International and churches in Asia (paper Q82/05) states, and one hopes that this may include Africa:

*“We affirm that it is our policy to enter new countries only where there is a clear need for our contribution, and with the encouragement of some church leaders in the region, or in response to an invitation from the government, or a church or a para-church agency in the country concerned (6)”*

The commentary on Q82/02 (7) declares that:

*“We express our priority by where we locate people. Our priority is ‘where there is scope for establishing new churches’, meaning where churches are already being established or potentially can be.”*

Algeria would fit these definitions. There are national and expatriate Christians who would welcome our ‘tentmakers’. There are few agencies and missions represented as most left at the time of the War of Liberation in 1966. However, the main reason for the involvement of BMMF Int. is that the Holy Spirit is working in a startling way. I saw this myself when I visited Algiers in February 1981. The Arab congregation had tripled in four years. I met a group of 35 young people who were nearly all recent converts planning how to establish new groups in the summer. In the summer of 1981 an expatriate worker said that leaving Algiers was like leaving a revival and he was reluctant to do so. BMMF Int has the ability at the moment to move where the Spirit is so manifestly working. Spain was a long way from Antioch and Tarsus and I suppose Algeria is just as far from Delhi and Karachi but then travel is easier.

#### **Recommendations**

1. that MTM team work be encouraged in key places. AEC 42/81a
2. that the facilitation of small cell groups of M converts be a stated objective AEC 42/81a
3. that BMMF Int pray for the establishing of new congregations.
4. that all concerned cooperate to keep MTM with a low profile especially in regard to operation and publicity.
5. that most MTM work be done at grass roots.
6. that increased research and surveying be financed and executed to facilitate strategic planning for work in new areas. AEC 42/81b
7. that BMMF Int recruit suitable ‘tent makers’ to work in Algeria where the Holy Spirit is doing a remarkable work among Muslims.
8. that recruitment for MTM be done quietly seeking those specifically called to this ministry, who have had experience in it, and have passed through rigorous screening (both for BMMF and ISA)
9. that BMMF Int encourage experimentation in the field of MTM, learning to ‘suspend judgement’ and watch and pray.
10. that BMMF Int facilitate the production of materials for use in MTM
11. that BMMF Int when invited cooperate with Asians in training Asians for MTM.

12. that BMMF Int. facilitate the involvement of Asian missions in MTM, providing links and introductions and suggesting structures to enable them to function outside their presently prescribed limits and countries.

### **Prayer for existing churches**

#### **Lord, take off our shoes**

Lord, take the shoes off this Church,  
not only physically, outwardly, actually,  
but inwardly also.

Lord, take the shoes off this Church -  
the shoes of pride and fear, complacency and factionalism.

Lord, take the shoes off this Church  
that the quality of its worship may touch the whole life of its people;  
And, to this end, put the shoes on this Church that it  
may go out to serve all men everywhere.

*(Taken from Empty Shoes by John Carden, p 97)*

### **Recommended for further reading**

1. *Christian Witness to Muslims* No 13 Thailand Report (Lausanne Occasional Papers) 1980
2. *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualisation* by Phil Parshall 1980