

Esther John

1929-60

Esther belongs to the world church as well as to the sub-continent. Named Qamar Zia, she grew up in a Muslim home in Madras (Chennai), India. At seventeen she was transferred by her father to a Christian school nearby. Through seeing God's love in her teacher's life and through Scripture lessons she became a secret believer in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. In 1947 she and her family sailed from Madras to Karachi to become citizens of the new country created in the name of Islam - Pakistan. Her Madras teacher contacted a Christian teacher in Karachi. Amazingly Marian Laugesen found Qamar amid the thousands of refugee settlers in Karachi. She gave her a pocket New Testament, which Qamar read through secretly twenty-seven times.

Years later when a Muslim marriage was arranged for her she sought refuge with Christians in Karachi. Later, for greater safety she was sent several hundred miles inland to Sahiwal. Eventually, in 1955 she was baptized, taking the name Esther John. The Christians in Sahiwal recognized her devotion to God and calling to be an evangelist. In 1957 they sent her to train at the United Bible Training Centre in Gujranawala. Everyone loved her. She and I often went together to visit homes in the villages around. She would speak of her experience of Christ and I would teach a little from the Bible. She graduated in 1959, starting her ministry in a country town near Sahiwal, staying in the guest apartment of the Whites, an experienced American couple. She accompanied Mrs. White on tours to visit women in many villages around. Sometimes they stayed several days in tents.

While I was on leave in the UK I heard from Martha, a fellow student of Esther at UBTC, that she had been brutally murdered one night in February 1960 as she slept. She was thirty years old. The police officer, going through her possessions looking for clues, told Mr. White, 'This girl was in love with your Christ'. God had already prepared me for this terrible news. I had noted in my diary a comment in a book by Geoffrey Bull that the early Christians were not concerned with living long but in dying at the right time. I knew that God would use this lovely woman's life and death for his glory. 'She still speaks, even though she is dead'. (Heb. 11:4 NIV).

On 9th July 1998 the statues of ten contemporary and representative martyrs (seven men and three women) of the three main church traditions – Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant were unveiled. The statues had been placed in ten empty niches over the West entrance of Westminster Abbey, London. The Archbishop of Canterbury, in the presence of the Queen, conducted this event during the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops. One statue is that of Esther John.

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Vivienne Stacey