

A STUDY OF PALESTINIAN MUSLIM CONVERSIONS TO CHRIST

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1 Introduction

Despite the difficulties of reaching the world of Islam with the gospel, individual Muslims do put their faith in Christ. Literature on the subject of Muslim conversions identifies an interesting range of conversion factors. However, little detail is available on Palestinian converts. Consequently, with the assistance of my wife, I conducted a qualitative study of eleven male and eleven female Palestinians in January 2003 to identify their key conversion factors.

As we embarked on this project, I used the following biblically-derived understanding of conversion: It is the process of transformation which occurs as an individual turns to Christ in humble surrender, encountering him by the power of God.² I applied this to converts from Muslim backgrounds living both in the State of Israel and territories occupied by Israel. For want of a better term in this politically tense context, I call the entire location “Israel/Palestine”.

2 Choice of Respondents

I was not in a position to conduct a thorough assessment of available field resources in Israel/Palestine before the interview process began. Apart from the impossibility of determining the number of converts in the area, I was largely reliant on others. I embarked on my research on the strength of contacts provided by Ray Register who had lived in Is-

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² The word “process” indicates all conversions take some time, although this is not an indefinite amount of time. “Transformation” highlights the new life the convert experiences on encountering Christ. “Humble surrender” includes surrender of self, especially as it is attached to sin, darkness, idols and Satan. This process occurs as the convert turns to Christ and as the triune God exercises his power. It is thus a divine-human synergy which cannot be artificially separated.

rael for many years, in addition to contacts I knew personally from my residence in Israel during the 1980s and Jordan in the 1990s.³ These contacts agreed to introduce me to Palestinian Muslim converts (and provide translation services where necessary), although the converts concerned were not identified in advance. To protect the converts interviewed, it is not my intention to reveal specific locations where the interviews took place.⁴

3 Use of Questionnaires

I drafted an open-ended (or semi-structured) questionnaire, to encourage each respondent to tell his or her own conversion story. I supplemented this with a comprehensive questionnaire to confirm insights gained from each story. The interviews thus began with five broad questions set out in the open-ended questionnaire to elicit respondents' conversion stories.

The strategy behind each interview was to begin with a question on childhood to break the ice and help them settle into talking as much as possible. Thereafter, questions focused on the kind of Muslims they were, how they came to Christ, what factors were most important in their conversions, and what their experiences had been since conversion. The goal of each interview though, was to hear in the convert's own words why he or she became a believer. Once the interviewees had told their stories, they were asked their responses to the comprehensive questionnaire. The follow-on use of the comprehensive questionnaire was to avoid influencing the converts' stories in any way, but

³ The assistance these contacts gave me was invaluable. Under normal circumstances, I would acknowledge and thank each one for his or her assistance. However, identifying such individuals by name could expose them to unnecessary risk and jeopardize their ministries. Islamic radicals have been known to attack missionaries as well as converts and I have no desire for my research to endanger or hinder those who helped me in any way.

⁴ Due to the poor security situation in Israel/Palestine, it is easy to attack a former Muslim with impunity in terms of the law against apostasy, and someone with evil intent could read this study and then launch a search for specific individuals in the localities concerned. Further detail on the research methodology used is available in my Ph.D. dissertation: "Muslim Conversions to Christ: An Investigation of Palestinian Converts Living in the Holy Land" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004).

it also allowed me to verify and supplement information from their stories immediately thereafter.

4 Summaries and Analyses of Conversion Stories

Each summary reflects a unique conversion account, told in response to my two questionnaires.⁵ There are similarities between them, as the same questions were asked in each case. However, they are the converts' stories, not mine; none was tailored to fit the above-noted understanding of conversion. They are nevertheless analyzed with this understanding of conversion in mind, while I note prominent emphases (and some inconsistencies). This prepares for an identification of each respondent's key conversion factors, after the summaries.

To protect the identities of the people concerned, I called the eleven interviewed men "M1" through "M11", while the eleven women are named "W1" through "W11". Many of them were influenced by believers to a greater or lesser extent. As a narrative device I introduce such believers alphabetically (from "Believer A" through "Believer L") as the stories unfold. This takes the place of giving them pseudonyms. It also eases identification of individuals who appear in more than one story. Such individuals are always given the same designation, with Believer A occurring most frequently. Other believers influenced the converts as well. However, these are often referred to in passing or as a group (e.g. Christian teachers), and so are not given alphabetized identities.

4.1 *Man1*

Description

M1 was single and in his late twenties. He had not been that devout a Muslim and did not know the Qur'ān well. However, he had always believed in Jesus (and his virgin birth), even though there were many things about Jesus he did not know from the Qur'ān. Differences between the Qur'ān and the Bible could be seen logically and both books played an important role in his faith in Christ.

⁵ For the most part, the summaries do not distinguish between information gained earlier or later in each interview. However, the analyses do take this factor into account, especially when converts' stories show any tendency of being unnaturally affected by outside influences (incl. suggestions stemming from the comprehensive questionnaire).

A key development was his meeting with two Americans (especially one of them, Believer A) staying in his hometown. They offered to pray for him and explained they were there to preach about Jesus and how one could have a relationship with him. They explained many things about Jesus to M1, and he also learned about Jesus from videoed Bible lessons in English and Arabic. The role played by the Americans, including the material on Christ they presented to him, was very important to his belief in Jesus.

His story also reflected a number of incongruities. He said believing in Jesus was not about changing one's religion (i.e. conversion), and he refused to say whether he was baptized. His close family accepted his faith in Jesus as long as he publicly remained a Muslim, but Muslims also played a role in his faith in Christ. He would not say whether the Bible was true, but stressed that the truth of Jesus' message was important. Christ's assurance of eternal life and answered prayer played a role in his faith. The person of Jesus was very important to him, but he did not admit Christ miraculously changed his life. He also refused to say whether Jesus had taken the shame of his sin on the cross and simply asserted that he came to believe in Jesus a long time before.

Analysis

One would wish it otherwise, it is difficult to find the crucial elements of conversion in M1's account. Although he speaks in the third person about a relationship with Jesus and acknowledges the importance of his person, his experience is centered in a growth of knowledge about him, based on both the Bible and the Qur'ān. In fact he speaks of believing (intellectually) in Jesus over a long period of time, which includes the period before he met Believer A. He is also reluctant to distance himself from Islam. It would be unfair to insist on a public declaration of baptism and renunciation of Islam as essential marks of true conversion, since many secret believers refrain from such publicity. However, M1 does not indicate that anything of great significance replaced Islam in his life. More specifically, his experience of answered prayer did not extend to the kind of (miraculous) transformation in his life which an encounter of Christ by the power of God would bring about. There is no indication that he surrendered to him in humility. Finally, his refusal to acknowledge that Christ took away his sin raises the question of whether he believes Christ had done so. It would thus seem M1 is a Muslim whose positive regard for Jesus has grown considerably as a

result of his exposure to Christians, but a transforming encounter with Christ is lacking.⁶

4.2 *Man2*

Description

M2 was a single, intelligent young man, and a firstborn son. His grandfather was a religious leader for fifty-eight years but this did not inspire M2 in any way. He did not pray or fast consistently. When he did so, it was to impress his Islamic community, as they would see him as an unbeliever if he neglected these observances. However, he did not believe in them and distanced himself from Islam before he trusted Christ. Rejection of Islam was not a factor in his conversion though. Qur'ānic references to Jesus played a role and he was curious about Christianity. He wanted to read more and had a local Christian radio station mail him some literature. At a time of personal crisis, emptiness in his heart drove him to the Lord, and he stressed the Bible was the most important factor in his coming to Christ. Its truth was particularly important to him, as was Jesus' person and message, and the assurance of his salvation. He also emphasized the sense of honor he experienced in being saved, as Jesus took the shame of his sin on the cross. As a result, his whole way of thinking changed. When a believer from a nearby university saw the material he received from the radio station, he arranged a personal meeting for him with a mature Arab Christian, Believer B. M2 was already a believer by this time and the meeting with Believer B essentially confirmed that he should follow the way of Christ. After this encouraging meeting, he began associating with a group of believers two or three times a week in a large center. He continued studying the Bible and grew in the conviction it was both true and alive.

⁶ M1's position is complicated by the fact that he was employed by Believer A at the time of the interview. This may have encouraged him to give the impression he was a believer despite the absence of a life-changing experience of Christ. In any event, while subsequent events in respondents' lives lie beyond the scope of the study (and in most cases are unknown to me), it was reported that M1 returned to Islam about a year after the interview. It thus seems fair to say that misgivings on M1's conversion emerging from the interview are justified.

With his conversion, his life was positively transformed. Problems had a solution, and he had a love in his heart for other people. Quite simply, God miraculously changed his life. His family saw the immediate change in him and his father took all the Bibles and Christian books he found in his room and burned them. However, ongoing problems he had with his father stopped when his non-religious uncle intervened on his behalf. He moved away from home to attend university and was grateful to be living in his current location, away from the restrictive atmosphere and rejection of his village. Although his conversion was influenced by the persecution of a believer, he was also pleased to be beyond the immediate influence of Hamas, who had threatened to kill him.⁷ He had been baptized and was very involved in Christian ministry, but did not feel much accepted by a believing community, possibly due to travel restrictions.

Analysis

M2 was clearly grateful to escape the restrictions of Islam, but the truth and life he saw in the Bible were crucial factors in his conversion. Truth and life were not limited to the Bible though; he was transformed as well. His story is full of the results of an encounter with Christ, and the power of God rather than social influences would best explain the change in his life. Jesus had taken the place of preeminence and the consequent newness he experienced was clearly visible to his unbelieving family and continued to influence him positively.

4.3 Man3

Description

M3 was a single young man from a difficult background. He had eight sisters and one brother. He helped support his family from the time he was thirteen. He felt alone, as his father had no time for him and his mother was busy with the babies. After finishing high school he began working for a drug dealer, in addition to running a vegetable shop in a

⁷ It is possible those seeking his harm would be arrested if they tried to reach him. Radicals, many of whom had records of Israeli detention, would know the risk of arrest if they tried to pass through the checkpoints between Palestinian population centers. M2 thus felt safe for the time being.

bad part of his hometown. As a Muslim, he went through the motions of Islamic practice, but was afraid of Allah.

One day a young German woman, Believer C, came to his shop. He loved her from the beginning as she had something special about her. After some months, they began to meet for discussions and she spoke to him about God. He invited her home to meet his family. They liked her, but said she should stop talking about Jesus. He told her what they said, but informed her later he wanted to know more, without his family's knowledge. She told him to read the Bible (in Arabic) but he didn't understand it. She also told him to pray for insight. He gradually got more out of reading it, and Believer C answered many of his questions. She refused to marry him because he was a Muslim but told him trusting Jesus would change everything. She then introduced him to Believer D, a married German woman, who explained the gospel to him. He felt God was speaking to him and he closed his eyes and responded to the message without caring about anything.

For the next two years he met with other believers and prayed with them, but when he was in the company of Muslims, felt he had done wrong in trusting Christ. He was baptized, but did not understand why. He prayed he would feel the Holy Spirit in his life. He wanted to have a relationship with God for the right reasons, not because of Believer C who had returned to Germany. However, he spent two weeks with Believer C and her family one Christmas, and when he returned it was clear he had to go the way of Christ. His spiritual life fluctuated and he visited Germany again after another two years. This time he went to further his relationship with God, and he trained with a Christian organization there. Just before he left Germany for Venezuela (for more training), he had an experience that seemed like he was "seeing a movie in the Spirit". Describing the experience as a supernatural dream, he said he switched off while he was awake (although those around him thought he was sleeping), and saw himself receiving the faith and love he had prayed for. Things then came together for him in Venezuela, as miracles he saw there helped M3 see himself as a Muslim before but as a believer in Christ now.⁸ He was baptized (again) at the end of his stay in Venezuela.

⁸ He spoke specifically of miracles, but did not say what they were. The important thing for M3 in Venezuela was the realization that he was truly a believer, rather than the means of that realization.

Reflecting on his conversion, he said he came to Jesus step-by-step. Each step was important, with the Holy Spirit accompanying each one. In fact the Holy Spirit was the most important factor in his coming to Christ. He also emphasized the importance of Spirit-led Bible-reading, the person of Jesus, and the lives of a number of believers in his conversion. Since then, life was imperfect but significantly better. His family had not known of the change in his life until a few months before the interview. Some of his cousins had threatened him. However, he had agreed with his family that knowledge of his conversion would not go beyond them to the Muslim community, although he was clearly part of a group of believers.

Analysis

The word “process” most accurately describes M3’s conversion. It is probable that a transforming encounter with Christ (for which he gives the Holy Spirit credit) did not occur until his supernatural dream. However, prior (Christian) experiences played a significant role and he could not speak of his conversion without including them. M3 might be likened to Jesus’ disciples or Cornelius (of Acts 10) who had several spiritual experiences in the process of conversion. However, (like them) there came a time when M3 could reflect on his experiences and say with assurance he was a believer indeed.⁹

4.4 Man4

Description

M4 was a high school teenager, converted two years before the interview. His close family members were not that religious although four of his uncles were, and he had been outwardly observant. Despite being a Muslim, he had attended a Roman Catholic school from the first grade. There had been mutual affection between him and the Catholics at first. He even attended Christian services, but from the fourth grade

⁹ The position of the German ladies might also be noted. Each was superseded by the Lord in due course, and they would undoubtedly be glad this was so. Thus M3’s encounter with Christ was not dependent on romantic ties to Believer C (although things began that way) or on the fact that he prayed a prayer with Believer D (although she may have considered him fully converted at that point). However, the roles the two of them played were essential to his being truly converted in the long run.

he supported a militant Muslim school gang against a Christian one and engaged in destructive behavior.

When he was in the eighth grade, his Catholic classmate and next door neighbor, Believer E, changed for the better. He told both the Muslim and Christian gangs that Jesus was responsible for his change. Believer E then invited M4 to Christian youth meetings. When M4 went, he saw the difference between Muslims and true Christians and felt accepted. Believer E also told him the difference between being a Catholic and being born again, so M4 opened his heart and accepted Jesus into his life.

M4 pointed to several other factors influencing his conversion as well. These were reading the Bible, reading Christian literature, the truth of Jesus' message, God's honor, and rejection of Islam.¹⁰ However, he was careful to stress that attacking Islam and Muhammad was not the way to win Muslims to Christ. In his case, the person of Jesus was the most important reason for his conversion.

Jesus changed his life miraculously and he became a lot less aggressive in the wake of his conversion. However, after he trusted Christ his parents and uncles asked a Muslim religious leader to deter him from his decision. Once there was a shouting match, but he resisted the temptation of throwing water in the man's face. His parents also expelled him from the house on one occasion. While he was shivering outside he had a vision of Jesus, who covered him with a kind of poncho and told him not to be afraid as he would never leave him. He had also experienced several answers to prayer. His parents would not allow him to attend church, so he prayed for them and now they allowed him to go, most of the time. At school, a nominal Christian teacher would beat him and he prayed for him too. The teacher changed for the better and M4 had the opportunity to tell him that this change came from God in answer to his prayer. M4 also said prayer made a differ-

¹⁰ These five factors came primarily from his response to the comprehensive questionnaire. They are included in the summary since he emphasized each of them strongly. However, M4 strongly emphasized most of the conversion factors which I asked respondents to rank. I thus evaluated the relative importance of these five factors in the light of all the information M4 gave me. This led to my narrowing down the number of really important factors that applied to M4. As a result, only two of the five mentioned here (rejection of Islam and the truth of Jesus' message) are included in the assessment of M4's key conversion factors.

ence in a bad political situation, like calming animosity between the Christian and Muslim communities in his hometown.

Analysis

Although still young, the transformation in M4's life is the substance of his story. Christian influences played a role from an early stage, but he was strongly attracted by others' changed lives. He cites many examples of change in his own life following his conversion. He also sees his personal transformation as the result of encountering Christ himself. However, it is interesting that supernatural experiences (including answers to prayer) only came after his conversion, and he did not mention his dream of Jesus until he was prompted in the interview to do so. It would thus seem these experiences should be seen as significant confirmations of his conversion, but not as vital elements of the (transforming) conversion itself.

4.5 Man5

Description

M5 was an older married man with a limited education. He had never been a religious Muslim, but when he was in the fourth grade, he had a vision of angels who were saying "glory to God in the highest". He didn't know where this vision came from or what it meant. Years later however, after his marriage and the birth of his first son, he went to the hospital where someone gave him a Bible. He started reading it and to his surprise found the words of his vision (in Luke 2:13–14), which he now recalled from his youth. The Bible became more and more interesting as he read it, and he found himself loving Jesus more and more. He also met Believer F (an American), who along with other believers (including Palestinians) played a role in his trusting Christ.¹¹

¹¹ It is very likely that M5's conversion is also recorded by Bill A. Musk, who relates that "in the 1960s in Palestine, a Muslim villager who had visited a Christian hospital several times, invited the missionary evangelist back to his village. There he recounted how, as a child, he had had a dream of angels in heaven, singing, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will toward men.' Later, as a young man he had discovered the verse in a Bible, which he had purchased. The invitation to the evangelist had been precipitated just recently. The villager's father had died and the villager had had another significant dream. Several days after his death, his father had appeared to him in a dream and told him to follow the evangelist's way. Through the resultant friendship, the villager has become a secret believer." Bill A. Musk, "Dreams and the

The vision he experienced in his youth was the most important factor in bringing him to Christ, although unusual experiences continued over the years since his conversion. Such experiences included being bitten by a snake without negative consequences, dreams of spiritual guidance (which he received and gave), answered prayer, and a possible premonition of September 11, 2001. However, other important elements in his conversion were the truth and person of Jesus as he emerged from the Bible (and Christian literature), God's honor and miraculous work in his life, and the positive life of a believer. He believed in Jesus' resurrection from his understanding of both the Qur'ān and the Bible, but Qur'ānic references to Jesus were not a factor in his conversion. Instead, the Bible became spiritual food for him and he wanted to hear more and more, learning that man does not live by bread alone but by the word of God (Mat 4:4).

M5 had not experienced much acceptance as a believer in Christ. Once an attempt was made on his life and he had to be hospitalized. He generally felt obliged to tell his unbelieving family he believed in Jesus from the Qur'ān. However, he loved the moral purity of believers and felt accepted by some, but not by all. Unfortunately, he was not in close fellowship with any group of believers at the time of the interview.

Analysis

M5 was handicapped by his unbelieving family and lack of Christian fellowship. However, his story points to a transforming encounter and continuing relationship with Christ. The Bible is particularly important as it helped make sense of his striking childhood vision, provided him with spiritual nourishment over many years, and above all revealed Jesus' person and truth to him. He may have derived special encouragement from the extraordinary experiences he had since his conversion, as they probably compensated for the absence of regular fellowship in his life. However, he kept up contact with Believer F and was very pleased with my visit. His association with believers who accepted him

Ordinary Muslim," *Missiology: An International Review* 16 (1988), p. 168. Differences in detail between Musk's and my accounts do not diverge significantly. However, since Musk's villager cannot be identified with absolute certainty, it seems best to restrict the analysis of M5's conversion to findings emerging from my own research.

(when circumstances permitted) and his appreciation of their moral values may thus be seen as additional evidence of a transformed life.

4.6 Man6

Description

M6 was a married young man with limited education. His family had some status, having lived in his hometown for seven generations. However, he stressed he was not the firstborn, felt he didn't belong, and was very rebellious as he grew up. He went to the mosque as a child but didn't take Islam seriously, disliked his own Muslim name, and had no time for other Muslims. (His father had been a religious leader, but during a six-year imprisonment turned to communism.) M6 had thus rejected Islam before his conversion and cited this as an important factor in his turning to Christ.

He loved Christians from childhood and wondered why they did better than Muslims. However, a converted Muslim, Believer G, was a key agent in his turning to Christ. Believer G spoke to him about Jesus, but M6 didn't trust him, thinking he might be a radical Islamist because of his beard. He nevertheless accepted a New Testament from him, which had Believer G's telephone number written inside. He read it and thought about it from time to time, but after seven months had a strange experience. He once was awake "after midnight", looked out the window, and suddenly saw something coming into his heart. He began to speak about Jesus and started loving him without even knowing him. He called Believer G and told him the one he had spoken of (Jesus) had come to him. Although very distrustful of Believer G, M6 began meeting with him, and learned about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. His life changed; he turned from his sin and started a new law-abiding life because he loved God. Important factors which he noted in his conversion were the person of Jesus, the truth of his message, God's honor, and political instability.¹²

The political situation weighed on him heavily. His outward circumstances had deteriorated considerably (due to the second *intifada*), and he was clearly strapped financially. However, he had peace and trusted

¹² These four factors emerged from his answers to the comprehensive questionnaire. Each fitted readily into the overall picture he gave of his conversion and so all are included among his key conversion factors, assessed below.

God. He also cited examples of God's intervention in his life, which had been somewhat more frequent at the beginning of his salvation experience. These included dreams, protection when the Israelis were searching his hometown, and answered prayer (for himself and his father's job). He felt accepted by believers from another location, despite difficulties in meeting with them due to security restrictions. He was a secret believer though and so had not experienced any persecution. He believed his brothers-in-law would kill him if they discovered his conversion.

Analysis

M6 clearly came from a difficult background. He suffered considerably from the effects of the political situation, as his father was incarcerated as he grew up and he was currently in dire economic straits. However, his approach to his community had been one of rebellion rather than solidarity and he had definitively rejected Islam. His transforming encounter with Christ thus took place in a setting of rebellion and rejection. His references to loving Jesus (as a result of his "after midnight" experience) and his showing love for God by turning from sin, suggest genuine change in his life. Transformation is also evidenced in his positive relations with believers, including those who accompanied me for the interview. As a secret believer he was still disconnected from his community. However, positive signs were his willingness to confess his faith before his unbelieving wife during the interview and his recent prayer for his father (which he believed was linked to resolving the latter's job situation).

4.7 Man 7

Description

M7 was a well-educated married man. He came from a strictly Islamic family and knew a good deal about Islam. However, when he was in elementary school, he began looking for a God who didn't enjoy killing, unlike what he learned in Islam. This quest was influenced by the loving relationship he enjoyed with his father, which gave him a positive image he could link to God. Years later, Believer H, a believer living in a Jewish settlement, gave him some Christian literature and he was attracted by the New Testament's focus on love rather than violence.

As the years passed he felt something pushing him to study and learn more, and he began to meet with Believer H in his home. Over the period of a year he discovered he was created to give his life to the Lord. Other believers meeting with Believer H encouraged him. He thus came to know Christ and found the true God when he gave his life to him. It was as if he was a boy who suddenly found his true father, and he experienced big changes in his life and character. He particularly stressed the importance of Christian fellowship in his conversion, while other factors of importance were assurance of eternal life, the person of Jesus and the truth of his message.

He had been accepted by a believing community, but also experienced strong rejection and persecution. Whenever he tried to break with something in his culture there were problems, but these problems encouraged him to trust the Lord more and so gain power from God to deal with them. He felt there would be many more Palestinian Muslim believers, were it not for people's fear of the (Palestinian) authorities. However, he did not see enough believers bringing the word of God to others, who surely had a similar longing to know the truth as he.

Analysis

Relationships played a key role in M7's conversion. He emphasized the importance of Christian fellowship, since he found the true God in this context. The relationship he had with his human father was also an important backdrop to his encounter with God as his Father.¹³ This encounter totally transformed his character, ending a search in which he moved from Islam and spent a lot of time reading the New Testament. Now, persecution notwithstanding, he demonstrated the change in his life by his strong desire that others would come to know Christ too.

4.8 Man8

Description

M8 was a well-educated married man. His parents were Muslim and he studied Islam at school like any other subject, but was not very religious. He was a lost person, living for nothing. As a teenager he found

¹³ This is of some interest, as Muslims instinctively reject the idea of God as Father, seeing all father/son relationships in physical terms. The fact that M7 eagerly received God as his spiritual Father would point to the supernatural element in his conversion experience.

some literature Believer H had given his friend, M7. He read this extensively and felt his mind and life being changed and cleansed. Later, as he read a Bible Believer H gave him, he felt he was finding something he had lost. Although his faith wasn't strong, his life changed all the more.

Once he was driving with Believer H and was forced off the road by a reckless driver. Believing he would die, he gave everything to the Lord, but they emerged from the car shocked but unharmed. Everything changed for M8 after this personal crisis. He realized he could rely on the Lord, and as he continued to study the Bible he grew in the conviction that someone who died for him was worth living for. Other factors contributing to his conversion were the person of Jesus, the truth of his message, assurance of eternal life, a dream, and God's honor.¹⁴ He had also considered faith in Christ after being arrested and stressed political instability as an important element in trusting Jesus for salvation.

His life improved after his conversion to the extent he had permanent joy, which even the death of his mother did not take away. He had also been accepted by a believing community and deeply appreciated Christian fellowship. However, he was experiencing severe persecution (including death threats) at the time of the interview and had also been persecuted in the past.

Analysis

M8 was a good friend of M7's and they were interviewed in each other's presence. However, there was no trace of one's story influencing that of the other. M8's conversion experience was essentially a process which culminated in a personal crisis. He experienced real, positive change as he read the Bible, but realized he could trust the Lord for everything after he survived being forced off the road. This conviction was enhanced by further Bible-reading, which made it clear he should live his whole life for Jesus, who died for him. In sum, this process certainly speaks of a transforming encounter with Christ, with

¹⁴ M8 placed differing emphases on these five additional factors as he answered the comprehensive questionnaire. It would seem only two of them, assurance of salvation and the person of Jesus, were really important in his case. They are reflected in the assessment below.

the caliber of change in his life evident in his experience of joy, despite personal sadness and persecution.

4.9 Man9

Description

M9 was a well-educated individual, married to a Jewish believer. As he grew up he fasted during Ramadan and prayed with his father on Fridays, but didn't feel strongly about religion. He began distancing himself from Islam when he was about seventeen and started asking religious questions. His 1948-refugee parents had managed to send him and his ten siblings to a private Catholic school, and this led to his gradually becoming aware of the concepts of sin and salvation. He went on to study at a Catholic university (rather than accept scholarships in Iraq or Russia) and later saw this as God's providence. In time, his (foreign) teachers there introduced him to what the Bible was all about. He had learned about the Islamic Jesus at school but now he saw something different in Christians, particularly their gentleness, mercy, devotion and love.

He began reading the Old Testament but battled to reconcile it with the love, joy and peace he learned about from Christians. He also had no desire to believe in the Zionists' God. However, when he read the New Testament, he understood its essential message but rejected it in his heart. He attended church services but kept experiencing a blockage, which prevented him from acknowledging the truth. However, by now he realized faith was not a matter of ethnicity or culture but entailed a change of heart. The first *intifada* broke out at this time and he was kept from his studies for almost three years. However, the worse the situation became, the more he thirsted for the Bible. One day, he had an experience which he likened to a dream: He felt peace and comfort, and the inaudible conviction that he must just believe in Christ. Moved by the person of Jesus, he confessed his faith in him with great emotion. Emerging from this crisis in his life, he wondered what would happen next.

Soon thereafter he took advantage of a remarkable opportunity to study Christianity in England. He was ordained there and also came to understand the relationship between Old and New Testaments, a process enhanced by his later marriage to a Jewish believer. He obtained Israeli citizenship as a result of this union, though he and his wife found

it difficult to be accepted as a couple. However, they were able to worship with a group that worked with both Arabs and Jews. While the future looked bleak (politically) he had no fear, concentrating on living with the Lord on a daily basis. His family had displayed a natural (i.e. negative) reaction to his conversion at first, but now he had good relations with them and used the freedom of movement which came with his citizenship to help them as much as possible.

Analysis

M9 came to understand Christian truth as a result of a Catholic education, positive Christian examples, and by reading the New Testament. Importantly though, he realized that a personal change of heart (i.e. transformation), rather than mere understanding was required. Nevertheless, a kind of blockage (involving his own resistance) kept him from turning to Christ until he had his dream-like experience. This marked the definitive encounter with Christ in his life, but the intensive Bible-reading which preceded it was crucial. The genuine change which followed may be seen in his coming to terms with the Old Testament and trusting the Lord daily, despite the difficult political situation.¹⁵

4.10 Man10

Description

M10 was a single man with American citizenship, devoted to ministry in Israel/Palestine. He was born in California, the son of a domineering Muslim Palestinian father and Catholic Brazilian mother. Although he and his older sister were not taught religion at home, they were brought up in Islamic culture and tradition. M10 was curious when he saw pictures of Jesus in the homes of his paternal uncles (who were also married to Brazilians), and when he was seven his mother let him borrow a children's Bible from the library. He read the stories, was attracted by the pictures, loved Jesus, and even experienced answered prayer, but his mother told him to hide the book from his father.

¹⁵ His marriage to a Jewish believer is also evidence of change in his life. However, an analysis of the challenging situation facing a Muslim Palestinian/Jewish believing couple living in Israel/Palestine, though enticing, lies beyond the scope of a study on Muslim conversions.

His mother left home when he was nine, and his father took him (and his sister) to his hometown in Israel/Palestine, leaving him there for three years. He asked his father about Jesus around that time, and was told Muslims respected him but there was one greater than he. M10 then became a fervent Muslim. His religious observance was inconsistent, but he wanted to go back to the United States to convert his childhood friends as they believed in Moses and Jesus, but omitted Muhammad. One evening, he had two contrary experiences. A young English-speaking believer spoke of Jesus' betrayal and he instinctively knew it was true. Then a Muslim girl mocked a crucifix, said Muslims had the truth, and he instantly went back to Islam. When he returned to America, however, he begged Allah to give him proof that Islam was correct, but received no answer. At one point he even threatened Allah he would turn to Jesus to answer him. He nevertheless remained a devout Muslim, and criticized his father for drinking alcohol. He still loved Jesus throughout this time.

When he turned fifteen, on the night before Easter, he was alone in his father's house, watching Oral Roberts on television. He was next to the same sofa where he read the Bible stories years before, when suddenly "the Spirit of God landed on top of him." He felt an explosion inside and it was as if Jesus had walked into the room. He instantly knew Jesus was the Son of God, and kept saying this, again and again. He painted a cross on his chest with toothpaste and called his mother to tell her he had become a Christian. He had hated her for deserting them, but now felt a love for her. Their relationship was restored. Reflecting on his conversion, he emphasized the role played by Christian media and literature rather than the Bible. He did not trust Jesus because he believed the Bible was true. However, the truth of Jesus' message was clearly of great importance, as was the person of Jesus. In sum, Jesus miraculously changed his life.

He went to church off and on after his conversion and they had him pray the sinner's prayer. However, when his father found out about his conversion he insulted him, slapped him, and threw him out of the house. His father threatened to have the church closed down due to his intermittent attendance, and two other churches rejected him for fear of legal suits brought by his father. He had neither fellowship nor Christian growth during this period; he rebelled, took drugs, and even tried to commit suicide. He also succumbed to pressure from his father and sis-

ter and said he would return to Islam. This wasn't genuine, and his father kicked him out of the house permanently. He then went to live with his mother, was allowed to attend church, and began to grow spiritually. He went on to complete Bible school and finally got the opportunity to go back to Israel/Palestine.

His ministry in Israel/Palestine had been quite dramatic. After returning, he was kicked out of two villages, was beaten, and received death threats (inter alia from Hamas). In fact, a believer was martyred in one of those locations a few months later. He also escaped a number of attempts on his life. He said he believed Hamas knew where he was (in the location where I interviewed him) but that they couldn't touch him because God would not allow His work to be stopped.

Analysis

M10 had intense religious feelings from an early age, fluctuating between Christianity and Islam. The latter religion prevailed, but his ongoing determination to be a good Muslim was weakened (but not eradicated) by Allah's silence. His Easter Saturday experience of Jesus marked the watershed in his life, although he had serious difficulties thereafter. That powerful encounter moved him to confess Christ with conviction (despite an incomplete biblical grounding), and he demonstrated an immediate and remarkable transformation in contacting and forgiving his mother. Weaknesses he then displayed as a young believer should be seen inter alia as the effect of a cruel, domineering father on a vulnerable teenager, and not as grounds to question the veracity of his conversion. Once he had the opportunity, he grew spiritually and he certainly displayed remarkable courage in his later ministry in Israel/Palestine.

4.11 *Man11*

Description

M11 was a single young man, converted a few months previously. He had been a devout Muslim from the age of two to fifteen and tried to read the Qur'ān daily. Islam did not satisfy him though, leaving a void in his life, and he effectively rejected it. His childhood was also characterized by psychological and medical problems. These included bad nightmares, voices in his head, poor sleeping and eating patterns, headaches, ringing in his ears, problems with his leg and eyes, and nervous-

ness. Many of these problems continued into adulthood. Occasionally he dreamed he heard bells and whenever this happened he slept peacefully, but he didn't understand what the dreams meant.

Ten months before the interview, he was seriously injured when an Israeli soldier shot him, and he did not expect to walk again.¹⁶ However, while he was in the hospital he heard the bells in his dreams once more and within eleven days he was able to walk, and was discharged. In the midst of this personal crisis he sensed a communication in his head about Jesus. Then, one night, he heard the name "Jesus son of Mary" and was told in a dream he was a sinner, a liar, and not committed to his work. He had to repent and keep the Lord's word in his heart. This dream calmed him, but he felt he had to get a Bible, and so obtained one from Believer I, whom he met at a Christian organization in his hometown.

He read the Bible intensely for two days. On the morning after he finished reading it, he awoke without a headache and found the ringing in his ears had gone. He was able to eat well and had peace in his heart. He told Believer I about this, and was taught about Jesus' conception and miracles. Believer I also told him to thank the Lord, confess his sins, read the Bible, and pray daily. He did so and experienced continued physical and psychological improvements in answer to his prayers. Now he trusted in the Messiah, having come to the person of Jesus not because anyone told him to, but because of the miraculous healing he experienced when he read the Bible.

He was still working through a number of issues (such as Jesus taking the shame of his sin on the cross), but life had improved spiritually, emotionally, physically and socially since his conversion. He felt accepted by other believers and had managed to avoid alienating his large family. He still told people he was a Muslim, but also told them he was healed through reading the Bible, and that he was continuing to read it. However, the transformation he experienced could happen to them too, and he hoped everyone would trust the Bible.

¹⁶ It would seem he was walking too close to an Israeli settlement and an over-zealous soldier shot him. Such occurrences are all too common in Israel/Palestine.

Analysis

M11's story is essentially one of miraculous transformation. He was still an immature believer from a difficult background, having an incomplete understanding of soteriology. However, he could not get over the changes God had wrought in his life. It is significant that he appreciated the miracles for pointing him to Jesus, that he spoke to Muslims about reading the Bible, and that the change in his life included a turning from sin. These elements suggest a genuine encounter with Christ, despite the short period since his conversion.

4.12 Woman1

Description

W1 was a married woman with young children. Although she completed high school, she was unable to write her final exam, being adversely affected by political unrest. As a Muslim she had been somewhat observant, but did not pray five times a day.

Many women in her community told her about the "Jesus place", a new home-based ministry in her neighborhood, devoted to Jesus. She knew about Jesus from the Qur'ān and wanted to know more. So she went there with others, learned about Jesus, and was moved by the positive life of a believer (Believer A) and answered prayer. She thus came to Christ through preliminary curiosity, but was drawn to him by love and faith. She also experienced a dream and stressed the importance of Jesus' person, the truth of his message, the role of media (such as tapes), and God's honor in her conversion.¹⁷

Jesus had miraculously changed her life and she spoke of experiencing love and faith in her heart. She felt accepted at the Jesus place and had not been persecuted. Although some did not approve, her extended family was fully aware of her faith, and for about a year she had hosted meetings in her home for twenty or so women who believed in or were seeking Jesus.

Analysis

"Love" and "faith" are key words in W1's story. Essentially she testifies to seeing these qualities in others and through her conversion, to

¹⁷ These latter elements emerged from her answers to the comprehensive questionnaire. She did not emphasize her dream, but the other four factors fitted readily into the picture of her conversion. They are thus included among her key conversion factors.

having experienced them for herself. Her story is not particularly dramatic, but she focuses on Jesus and speaks of miraculous change in her life. This change is also evident in her willingness to use her home as a place where other Muslim ladies could meet Jesus or be encouraged in their faith in him, despite some opposition from people in her community. There seems no reason to doubt that W1 had a transforming encounter with Christ.¹⁸

4.13 Woman2

Description

W2 was a widow (and grandmother) with limited education. She never knew her father, married early, and was a 1967 refugee, but described her life experience as normal. She also saw her Muslim existence in normal terms, although it was unclear how consistent her prayer habits had been. Somewhat incongruously, she said Jesus, Moses and Muhammad were the same since all were prophets, and there was no difference between Christian and Muslim places of worship.

Knowing about Jesus from the Qur'ān, she followed him because he was a prophet. However, she asserted an urge to follow him came from God's Spirit. She had found the Jesus place (mentioned by W1) in her hometown, and went there to find out more about Jesus and to benefit from him. She had suffered a stroke (or similar medical condition) and this personal crisis was of great importance in her trusting Christ. Answered prayer which was related to this condition (rather than the ailment itself) was a vital factor in her conversion, and she had a dream too, the content of which was now forgotten.

She also emphasized the person of Jesus and truth of his message, the role of media (such as tapes), and God's honor as elements influencing her conversion. She had gone to the Jesus place on her own, but the fact that other women in her community turned to Christ was of

¹⁸ Her lack of response to the statement on baptism in the comprehensive questionnaire should not be overemphasized. M1, who took my wife and me to W1's home and acted as translator, asked that this question be omitted for reasons of sensitivity, and this applied to W2 through W8 as well. It is probable that many of these ladies were baptized (on the strength of information I received from Ray Register and Believer A). Feelings of particular sensitivity on baptism would thus apply to M1, but not necessarily to W1 through W8. Baptism, of course, is a key pointer to conversion though not integral to conversion itself.

some significance. She intimated that a believer's life (presumably Believer A) influenced her conversion although this did not affect her beforehand.

Since she trusted Jesus she was relaxed, had more security and peace of mind, and agreed that Jesus had miraculously changed her life. She felt very accepted at the Jesus place and had not experienced any persecution though it was clear her son disagreed with the content of her Christian faith. She was sickly, but was hosting a regular meeting for women associated with the Jesus place in her home.

Analysis

Despite incongruities in her story, W2 points to a fundamental change in her life as a result of divine intervention. It is probable her comments on the equality of Islam and Christianity were for her unbelieving son's benefit, as he sat next to her throughout the interview and made several unsolicited comments of his own. I was a little concerned about the veracity of her conversion while she answered the open-ended questionnaire. However, her answers to the comprehensive questionnaire made it clear she aligned herself with key elements of Christian salvation history and theology, her limited educational background and her son's disagreements (on Christ's resurrection for instance) notwithstanding. It thus seems fair to conclude, from her answers to both questionnaires in the presence of an unbelieving relative, that she had indeed been transformed in an encounter with Christ and was not ashamed to say so.

4.14 Woman3

Description

W3 was a grandmother with limited education. As a Muslim she prayed and fasted, but was not that observant. However, years beforehand she experienced a personal crisis which would influence her conversion. As a child, she had a disability in one leg and her mother placed her in the care of a (Palestinian) Christian family. While she stayed with them, they prayed for her and she made a full recovery.

Decades later, she moved into the neighborhood where the Christians had been. As it turned out, the house where she was healed was now called the Jesus place and she heard that Believer A was living there. So she decided to go and introduce herself, accompanied by a

relative. They were wearing black dresses and on their arrival Believer A told her their visit fulfilled a dream in which women clothed in black were seen coming to the house. This made a big impression on her and she brought more women to the Jesus place at his request.

The exact role played by believers' lives in her conversion is uncertain, but Believer A was clearly important. Some women with minor illnesses were healed when he prayed for them, and he provided some assistance with food for their families. He also taught W3 that Jesus was the Savior who took the shame of sin from all the peoples of the world. This was the most important factor in her coming to Christ, coupled with Jesus' person and the truth of his message. She also emphasized answered prayer, God acting miraculously in her life, and God's honor. She had a dream as well (which Believer A explained), but was no longer clear on all its details.

Since her conversion, the financial crisis she experienced (in the broad context of political instability) had improved, in part due to answered prayer for a job for her daughter. She had good relations with the believing community and led a group of about thirty women in her home. She had not experienced any problems with persecution and her sons and daughters even took care of the grandchildren when the Jesus film showed on television, so she could watch it undisturbed.

Analysis

Supernatural elements, demonstrating the power of God over a period of time, stand out in W3's conversion story. However, while the location (the Jesus place) where it all happened and the main human agent (Believer A) are important, her focus is on the person and work of Jesus. Indeed, of her own accord she underlines Christ's saving work in taking (her) sin. Encounter with Christ is thus central and the change in her life may be seen in the spiritual maturity she displays for one converted less than three years before. This maturity includes her reliance on the Lord rather than Believer A in her financial crisis, her recognition that she should be undisturbed to learn about Jesus (from the film), and her leadership of many other women. Her story thus points to genuine transformation in response to supernatural encounter.

4.15 Woman4

Description

W4 was a married woman whose children had died in infancy. She grew up in Jordan but moved (back) to Israel/Palestine after she married. She would pray and fast like most Muslims do, and even made the lesser or '*umra* pilgrimage to Mecca. However, her neighbor in Jordan often took her to the Catholic Church. Most of her husband's friends were Christians, and they all lived together amicably.

One day, (Muslim) family friends brought Believer A to her home and she started going to the Jesus place. Believer A explained a dream she had and she felt refreshed after he prayed for her. In particular, he told her about Jesus and gave her tapes about him. She emphasized Jesus' person and the truth of his message as key factors in her conversion, but did not agree that Jesus had taken the shame of her sin on the cross. She nevertheless acknowledged that God miraculously changed her life, and gave evidence of this as she spoke of the tragedy of losing her six children. Although she had not given birth to any more since her conversion, she had come to accept the loss of her babies and had peace of mind about it.

The improvement in her life since her conversion was also evidenced in her loving people around her and feeling loved in return. She certainly felt accepted by believers from the Jesus place and led a women's group in her home.¹⁹ In addition, her husband and nephew had both been healed in answer to prayer. However, she had experienced some persecution, including being interrogated by a religious Muslim, which led to the effective confiscation of the tape meant for her home meeting on the day of the interview.

Analysis

Personal transformation is the key element of W4's story, although she exhibits some weakness in her theological understanding. It would seem her exposure to (Catholic) Christianity over the years played a supportive role in her conversion, but the definitive change in her life came through her exposure to the Jesus place (and Believer A's minis-

¹⁹ W4 was meeting with W5, W6, W7 and W8 at the time of the interview and I made use of the opportunity to interview them all. Each related her conversion story in turn, before they answered the comprehensive questionnaire.

try). This change is particularly evident in her coming to terms with the deaths of no less than six children, in a culture which links a woman's worth to childbearing.²⁰ Coupled with this is the love and acceptance she experienced as a believer and the support she showed others as group leader. She was hosting her group despite the incidence of persecution and the limited facilities at her disposal. Her "home" was a tent of black plastic next to an incomplete cinder block house. In addition to the (miraculous) transformation in her life, she made it clear that the person of Jesus and the truth of his message were crucial to her conversion. It would thus seem best to see her disagreement that Jesus took the shame of her sin as incomplete understanding, rather than evidence that she was not truly converted.

4.16 Woman5

Description

W5 was a married woman with limited education. She came from a large family and now had a large family of her own. She had been an observant Muslim, describing herself as "ninety-nine percent" religious.

She went to the Jesus place with a (Muslim) neighbor and was struck by the love and friendly feeling there. She thus wanted to know more about Jesus and understand who he was. She experienced answered prayer, benefited from the Jesus place's teaching resources, and was encouraged by a Christian neighbor. However, Jesus' person and the truth of his message were key factors in her following him. She did not agree that Jesus took the shame of her sin on the cross, but did say he miraculously changed her life.

The affairs of her life had become easier. She was welcomed by the believing community and was meeting with W4 at the time of the interview. At first, some people in her community spoke against her association with the Jesus place, but no one had persecuted her, and her family was happy with her involvement.

²⁰ It is remarkable that her husband didn't leave her (or take a second wife). The shame of her loss and his having no descendants (let alone male descendants) would weigh on him heavily, and it would be socially acceptable to find another wife to bear him children. I met him only briefly, but it is very likely he was a believer too, which might account for his faithfulness.

Analysis

At face value, W5 testifies to a straightforward, simple conversion. Unfortunately, her answers to the comprehensive questionnaire are virtually identical to those of W4, in whose presence she was interviewed. W5 only differs on pilgrimage, Bible-reading and a dream, none of which had any influence on her. It is thus possible that she felt some obligation to answer the comprehensive questionnaire the same way as her esteemed group leader, which would suggest that its results not be weighed too heavily in evaluating her conversion. Thus neither her disagreement that Jesus took her sin nor her agreement that he miraculously changed her life should be taken too seriously. However, if her response to the open-ended questionnaire is taken alone, she has nothing specific to say about change in her life (as answered prayer, like miraculous change, came from the comprehensive questionnaire).

I would like to give her the benefit of the doubt, but have to acknowledge how easily one with limited education might follow a leader's example. Since she does not speak clearly of a transforming encounter herself, it might be best to see W5 as a Muslim woman who is happily associating with believers and displaying a continued interest in learning more about Jesus. This could be seen as a crucial stage in the entire conversion process.

4.17 Woman6

Description

W6 was a divorced woman with limited education. She had been an observant Muslim, but grew up without a father. Years later, she lost her job at a local hotel with the onset of the second *intifada*, was left without an income and couldn't feed her children. She emphasized there was no one to help her.

W4 introduced her to Believer A and he prayed for her. In response, God provided her with a new job, a new place to live, and also healed her sick daughter. This provision was crucial to her conversion and she emphasized God's miraculous work in her life. Although she did not agree that Jesus took the shame of her sin on the cross, she was influenced by teaching stemming from the Jesus place and stressed Jesus' person and the truth of his message as important factors in her conversion.

In addition to the provision for her children which accompanied her conversion, she was accepted by believers and was meeting in W4's home at the time of the interview. She had positive feelings about them and they cared for her. Unfortunately, people in her housing complex reported her to the police for associating with the Jesus place, and it seemed that she might lose her home. However, after praying she told the manager of the housing complex what had happened to her and he accepted her explanation.

Analysis

W6 was interviewed in the presence of W4 (and the others in her group). The answers she gave to the comprehensive questionnaire vary somewhat from those of her group leader, and her story is clearly centered on God's intervention in her life. W6 appreciates the fellowship of ladies with whom she meets (in W4's home) but describes her relationship with God somewhat independently of her relationship with the group. Her reliance is primarily on God, not on them. It thus seems fair to accept her answers to the comprehensive questionnaire as her own, and these, together with her personal details (included in the summary above), point to a transforming encounter with Christ. Her disagreement that Christ took the shame of her sin is probably no different from W4's (i.e. an incomplete understanding) and this may indicate an area of doctrinal weakness affecting W4's home group in particular.

4.18 Woman7

Description

W7 was a younger married woman with limited education. She lost her father at the age of ten, but as far as religion was concerned, prayed and fasted like other Muslims. Sometime after she grew up and married, her mother began going to the Jesus place. She followed her mother's example, but started attending the associated group which met in W4's home (rather than going to the Jesus place as such).

The most important factors in her coming to Christ were curiosity and wanting more knowledge about Jesus, which she gained as a result of the Jesus place's teaching ministry. She thus emphasized Jesus' person and the truth of his message as important conversion factors. Although she did not agree that Jesus took the shame of her sin on the

cross, she acknowledged that he miraculously changed her life. She also experienced answered prayer when her husband improved a good deal after suffering pain in his shoulder and leg.

She had peace of mind since she trusted Jesus and life had improved. Her children were doing better in school, she had a job, and she felt accepted by the community of believers. Moreover, she had experienced no persecution or trouble whatsoever. In fact, some of her family members had come to the meetings in W4's home with her.

Analysis

W7 was also interviewed in the presence of the rest of her group. Her answers to the comprehensive questionnaire are identical to W5's (and hence virtually the same as W4's), which would suggest some influence from the others at this point. However, she came across as a strong character in the interview, and provided valuable pointers to her conversion in the answers she gave to the open-ended questions. Although her mother played a role in her involvement with the Jesus place, her participation was now independent and she was even instrumental in bringing others to meetings. She stressed her desire to know more about Jesus as a key conversion factor, had experienced specific answers to prayer (and improvements in her life), and spoke of the peace of mind she now had. This would suggest a genuine (transforming) encounter with Christ although like, others in her group, her understanding of salvation theology was less than perfect.

4.19 Woman8

Description

W8 was a recently widowed woman with limited education. As a Muslim, prayer and fasting characterized her religious practice. She lived with her husband in Jordan for many years, but when they returned to her hometown, he fell ill and was hospitalized.

She heard that Believer A prayed for people regularly, began attending meetings at the Jesus place, and had him pray for her husband in the hospital. Although her husband died some time later, he did show an improvement in response to Believer A's prayer. She went to the Jesus place regularly after this and learned something from the lessons. However, the most important factor in her coming to Christ was being healed herself, in response to the prayer of another believer. She also

emphasized Jesus' person and the truth of his message as important conversion factors. She had a dream as well, which she did not describe,²¹ but in sum Jesus miraculously changed her life.

She did not agree that Jesus took the shame of her sin on the cross, but felt the mercy and grace of God after she trusted Jesus, and her life had improved. She was still coming to terms with her husband's death but was definitely sustained by her knowledge of God's grace and the emotional support she received from W4's group. She added that some people rejected her association with believers, but people didn't have any power over her. In fact, her family was happy with her decision to follow Jesus.

Analysis

W8 was the last of the women interviewed with W4. Although her responses to the comprehensive questionnaire are very similar to (and portray the same weakness of) the others in the group, she clearly has her own story to tell. Strikingly, her conversion account is not adversely affected by her husband's death, despite earlier answers to prayer on his behalf. This is probably because her focus is on what God did for her personally, especially in her experience of physical healing, but also through the truths she learned. While her (miraculous) healing was crucial, she strongly emphasizes her experience of God's grace as well. This certainly points to a transforming encounter with Christ, with that transformation continuing to show itself in the way she was dealing with her bereavement and in her bold assertion that people had no power over her.

4.20 Woman9

Description

W9 asked that her conversion story not be published. Without violating this request, it may be stated that key factors influencing her conversion were the role played by a genuine believer, the importance of the Bible,

²¹ She acknowledged that she had a dream in response to the comprehensive questionnaire. From the thrust of all her conversion information, it was not a prominent factor, and she showed no interest in elaborating on it. For this reason, she was not asked to describe it.

particularly as it contrasted with Islam's teaching on women, and her calling out to God.

Analysis

In W9's answer to a question from the comprehensive questionnaire, she disagrees that Jesus Christ miraculously changed her life. Essentially, this seems to indicate she did not experience miracles such as extraordinary dreams or healings. It should probably not be taken as a denial that she has been transformed in an encounter with Jesus. Evidence of the latter may be seen in her strong feeling of honor that Christ would save her. I can also testify from independent observation that her conversion appears genuine.

4.21 Woman10

Description

W10 was a single young woman who lived alone. She was severely abused as a child and lived in an institution for many years. As a result, she suffered physically, psychologically and educationally. She hadn't known much about Islam, didn't take prayer or fasting seriously, and reading the Qur'ān only made her life more difficult.

In the midst of her ongoing personal crisis as a child, a Muslim relative gave her a Bible, apparently to get rid of it. Someone who saw it in her possession offered to introduce her to a child evangelist, Believer J. She was unsure about this as she was a Muslim, but felt compelled to see him anyway and they had a positive meeting. Although this didn't lead to her conversion immediately, a German woman, Believer K, told her Jesus would help her if she opened her heart to him. She then prayed to the Lord, surrendered to him, and felt a peace. She later felt rejected by Believer K, who wanted W10 to love Jesus more than W10 loved her. However, the Lord miraculously enabled her to do this, and she now had a normal relationship with Believer K.

In addition to the loving influence of Christians (such as Believers J and K), reading the Bible played a key role in her conversion. She had reading limitations which took time to overcome, but by God's intervention was able to understand the Bible (with its focus on love), and could correct sinful habits like lying. She also had a dream in which she was convinced of Jesus' love for her, in contrast to the negative experiences of her childhood. Other factors contributing significantly to

her conversion were rejection of Islam, God's honor, the person of Jesus and the truth of his message.²²

Life improved slowly after she trusted Jesus, and now she spoke to him direct. Her health was better, as she no longer took psychiatric medicine and had lost a lot of weight. She experienced some difficulties in her relations with other believers in the beginning, but these were resolved and the believers welcomed her. Her parents had come to accept her desire to live alone and knew she was a believer. An aunt criticized her church attendance, but W10 asked why her family hadn't cared for her when she was a Muslim. She stated that she would never turn from the Lord yet still loved her family. In conclusion, she expressed the hope that people would be helped by her testimony.

Analysis

W10's story points to a remarkable transformation from beginning to end. She changed from being an abused, overweight, medication-dependent teenager to a healthy young woman who lived successfully on her own. She overcame her reading difficulties. She stopped lying, was accepted by others and even had love for her abusive family. However, the single, unifying, reason for these changes was her encounter with the Christ who loved her, conveyed through loving believers, the Bible, and a dream.

4.22 Woman11

Description

W11 was a single, well-educated young woman. Her Muslim family was not religious and she did not pray regularly, although she fasted occasionally. Five years before the interview, a friend, Believer L, gave her some academic assistance, telling her she did so for the sake of Jesus. This confused W11, but at the same time she was attracted by what she learned about Jesus, both from Believer L and others at work. In fact she believed everything she heard about him, but could not believe he was God.

²² These four factors emerged from her responses to the comprehensive questionnaire. From all the information she gave, rejection of Islam and the person of Jesus came across as more significant. They are thus included among her key conversion factors below.

Sometime later, her family allowed her to attend a Christian conference with Believer L. Constant references to Jesus' deity at the conference annoyed her and she asked the preacher about it. After a long discussion, she still wasn't satisfied, but he prayed with her, thanking the Lord that she had accepted Jesus. She then told Believer L the preacher was wrong in assuming she had accepted Christ. However, the next morning, after she woke up, she had a vision in which she saw the Lord Jesus pointing at her heart, and then saw herself flying through the air and entering a cloud of light. Right afterward she ran and told Believer L about this miraculous dream, and Believer L informed her that seeing Jesus marked the first day of her spiritual life. W11 remained confused though: on the one hand, she loved Jesus, but on the other, she could not accept him because the Christians said he was God.

She struggled with a number of questions over the next year. Gradually, in the midst of her confusion, she told God she wanted him in her life, whoever he was. She then had an inner feeling that God was in Jesus, and she prayed that he should not leave her but help her. From that stage in her life she could say with conviction that Jesus was God, and was baptized around the same time. She realized later the Holy Spirit had enabled her to believe Jesus' deity without being persuaded. So her dream, God's miraculous work in her life, and the person of Jesus were key factors in her conversion.

She had been warmly accepted by a believing community and hadn't been rejected or persecuted, since her family didn't know she was a believer. She said she didn't know her family like she knew Jesus. There was some Christian influence at home in that her father had read the New Testament. However, the big difference between her family and W11 was the intellectual understanding they had of Christianity versus her change from within.

Analysis

God's intervention and the resulting transformation of her life make up the essence of W11's story. The encounter with Christ she experienced in her dream played a central role in her conversion process, but it seems fair to say the process was incomplete until she resolved the question of Jesus' deity. Interestingly, this took place in a spiritual rather than intellectual context, as she humbly surrendered herself to God on his terms rather than hers. Believers also played an important supporting role. However, while Believer L's friendship (and invita-

tion) led to her being in the environment where she had the dream, the preacher who tried to manipulate her conversion did not seem to help her at all. The key for W11 was being changed on the inside, and that was due to the power of God.

5 Identified Conversion Factors

Each of the conversion stories is unique, and relevant conversion factors vary from individual to individual. At the same time, these accounts have important points in common. All but two reflect the essential nature of conversion (i.e. a transforming encounter with Christ), and certain conversion factors occur again and again. So, we should now seek conversion factors applicable to the group as a whole.

Duane R. Monette, Thomas J. Sullivan and Cornell R. DeJong discuss the application of content analysis *inter alia* to documents recording interviews. They note the practice of developing “a coding scheme that can be used in analyzing the documents at hand,”²³ adding that such coding schemes “generally fall into one of four categories: (1) presence or absence of an element, (2) frequency of occurrence of an element, (3) amount of space devoted to an element, and (4) intensity of expression.”²⁴

In the case of my research, frequency of and amount of space devoted to specific conversion elements are largely predetermined by the way I structured the questionnaires. Focusing on these categories would codify my research methods rather than the research findings themselves. However, a combination of the first and fourth categories (i.e. presence of an element and intensity of expression) would seem to apply to my research findings. Although intensity of expression is difficult to identify in every story, each respondent acknowledged factors of great importance in his or her conversion. Listing the presence of these important factors would thus comprise a coding scheme to efficiently yet accurately identify the key conversion elements for each individual.

²³ Duane R. Monette, Thomas J. Sullivan, and Cornell R. DeJong, *Applied Social Research: Tool for the Human Services* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1986), p. 175.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

[illegible]

Table 1 Key conversion factors of Palestinian men and women

Key conversion factors are not drawn directly from the answers to the comprehensive questionnaire, but from the summaries and analyses which present these answers in coherent narrative frameworks.²⁵ These are reflected in Table 1, which presents the key conversion factors for

²⁵ The process of content analysis and codification is thus already involved in the reduction of the stories to summaries set out above, since findings from both questionnaires are relayed as a coordinated whole. At the same time, of course, the summaries aim to reflect the communicative intent of each convert fairly.

the men and women respectively. The tables pave the way for the following analysis, which determines characteristics of the group as a whole.

6 Analysis of Palestinians' conversion factors

6.1 Role of Islam

It would be incorrect to attempt an interpretation of my research findings by using the kind of precise statistical methodology that properly belongs to quantitative research. Patterns drawn from the conversion factors identified above are simply portrayed in terms of prominence.²⁶ The evidence points to the absence or scarcity of some conversion factors, but to frequent repetition of others. Conversion patterns applicable to the group of Palestinian respondents are thus presented in categories of lesser and greater prominence.²⁷

Before I consider important conversion factors noted by a minority of the interviewees, it is useful to consider an element which is broadly lacking. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated a weak pre-conversion commitment to and involvement in Islam. Many would pray and fast as a matter of course, but none was a member of the Muslim clergy. Only one (W4) had been to Mecca but her journey was the lesser *'umra* pilgrimage. Thus no convert stands out as a particularly strong Muslim before his or her conversion. M10 might consider himself an exception, but he should probably be seen as one who felt deeply about Christianity as well as Islam, and felt drawn by both in different ways. He did not embrace Islam unequivocally.

Converts' weak Islamic backgrounds partly support the expectation that a strong Islamic influence would inhibit conversions. This seems true of the converts as individuals, but not necessarily of their commu-

²⁶ I acknowledge that the prominence given some factors rather than others is partly the product of my analysis. No clearly significant factor is left out, but another analyst might include factors I consider less important, or omit one or two I include. Patterns for the group are thus discerned from broad trends, not from precisely-detailed minutiae of my analysis. In addition, detail from the research which has no bearing on conversion patterns is omitted.

²⁷ Categories of prominence apply to the group as a whole, but also to sub-divisions within the group. However, sub-groups are not arbitrarily identified in advance. They are designated sub-groups only when certain conversion elements clearly apply to them.

nities. There is no pattern of deeply-committed Muslims turning 180 degrees and becoming believers in Christ. However, seven of the men received death threats after their conversions, which points to strong community disapproval.²⁸ Six of these seven also felt post-conversion rejection by their communities, in addition to two of the women (W1 and W9). It thus seems strong Islamic influences were absent in the converts themselves, but were often present in their communities. However, these influences were not strong enough to prevent converts emerging from those communities.²⁹

It is also noteworthy that a majority of the men experienced (or feared) death threats, but apparently none of the women did. Most of the latter did not feel rejected by their communities, and the role community played in some of the conversions is discussed below. However, the differential on death threats marks out a significant sub-group of males who were not strong Muslims themselves, but were converted in Islamic communities (or families) which responded with vehemence to their new life in Christ. It is thus apparent death threats are an issue for male Muslim converts in Israel/Palestine.

6.2 Categories of lesser prominence

We turn now to specific conversion factors cited by a minority of respondents. Some converts strongly emphasized unique factors. These are not discussed in detail here since they do not contribute as such to the patterns of conversion emerging from the interviewed Palestinians. However, if they are phrased a little differently, they might be classified with more prominent factors, which I discuss and tabulate below. Thus both M3's emphasis on the Holy Spirit's role and M7's discovery of God as his true Father could be seen as aspects of God's miraculous involvement in their lives. Similarly, M7's focus on Christian fellowship could fall under the category of the role of believers. Also, W9's

²⁸ In addition to the seven who received death threats (M2, M3, M4, M5, M7, M8, and M10), M6 feared his extended family could kill him, although as a secret believer he had not been threatened.

²⁹ Four of the eight men who received or feared death threats (M2, M6, M7 and M8) were positively influenced by the persecution or martyrdom of a believer. Knowledge of the suffering of others quite probably encouraged them as they trusted in Christ in a hostile environment.

pointer to the importance of the Bible's teaching on women could be characterized under reading the Bible.

Assurance of salvation was specifically linked to only one convert (M8). Another analyst might choose to emphasize this element more strongly, as all but two of the converts said they trusted Jesus because he gives assurance of eternal life. I did not identify it as a key conversion factor applicable to most respondents, since it did not emerge as such from their stories. It might nevertheless be seen as an important component of the truth of Jesus' message, which is discussed in the next subsection.

Other significant conversion factors were cited by several respondents, although they are still a minority. These factors are political instability, rejection of Islam, Christian media, personal crisis, community, and God's honor.

6.2.1 Political instability

I expected political instability (or unrest) to feature prominently in Muslim conversions to Christ.³⁰ Felt needs, related to political instability affect every Palestinian to a greater or lesser extent. However, this did not influence many conversions.

Three respondents, M4, M6, and M8, indicated the importance of political instability, but each of them saw it differently. M4 was moved by tension between Muslim and Christian communities in his hometown and by his own participation in a Muslim gang. M6's past and present were overshadowed by the Israeli occupation. It influenced both his rejection of Islam and his recognition of God's deliverance in a situation of ongoing severity. M8 considered faith in Christ after being arrested, being one of only three to do so.³¹ It would seem M4, M6 and M8 each had a different set of felt needs, which they expressed in a broad context of political instability. However, in each case their sto-

³⁰ The comprehensive questionnaire was constructed to include this and two other factors (honor and God's miraculous action) which I thought would be prominent.

³¹ The two others, M2 and M7, did not link spiritual contemplation under arrest to political unrest, so the latter does not appear as an important factor in their conversions. Similarly, W1 and W3's conversion accounts do not support the emphasis they gave political unrest in one of the questions. Consequently, including it among their key conversion factors seems unjustified.

ries demonstrate the Jesus they encountered in their need was more important than the need itself.

Political instability, however experienced, thus plays a contributory role, but no more, in a minority of conversions. For most of the Palestinians, political instability may be too common a factor in their lives to suggest itself as an avenue for the transforming encounter of conversion.

6.2.2 Rejection of Islam

As noted above, none of the respondents was a particularly strong Muslim before his or her conversion. In fact, six of them rejected Islam before they became believers. However, only two of these (M6 and W10) linked this prior rejection to their encounters with Christ. M4 on the other hand did not reject Islam before he believed, but did so as part of his fairly recent conversion. Thus, of the three who cited rejection of Islam as an important conversion factor, only M4 placed that rejection in the midst of his conversion experience. At the same time, he was the one (of all the converts) who cautioned me against criticizing Islam. He did not wish to imply that rejection of Islam was the key to Muslim conversions, whether his own conversion or that of anyone else.

Apart from the uniqueness of M4's rejection of Islam, other evidence supports his caution on the significance of this factor. At least half the converts affirmed they considered Jesus because of the Qur'ān's teaching about him. This suggests rejection of Islam's holy book was not an immediate part of these conversion experiences. In addition, most of the respondents appeared to move away from Islam independently and often as a result of their conversions. Consequently, while the Palestinians surveyed were weak Muslims, the vast majority were not converted because they rejected Islam. Other factors were central to that.

6.2.3 Christian media

The role of Christian media was prominent in five cases, those of M1, M8, M10, W1 and W2. The types of media varied and had different effects from one respondent to another. M1 learned a lot about Christ from videoed Bible lessons. However, the impact this had on him may be questioned in the light of his dubious conversion experience. M8 read literature in the possession of his friend, M7. This led to his reading the Bible, which enhanced a process of positive change in his life.

M10 was exposed to a children's Bible and Christian television, both in an American context. The former engendered a love for Jesus, while the latter provided the occasion for his dramatic encounter with Christ. W1 and W2 both emphasized the role played by Christian tapes. These seemed to be significant means of their coming to know and accept the truth of Jesus' message.

There is thus no pattern of one particular Christian medium standing out as the means of conversion. The absence of a pattern would also apply to the Jesus place, which ministered to W1 through W8 (and to M1). Audio-visual materials were certainly common in that context, probably because most converts had limited education and found reading difficult. In fact, audio-visual Christian media seemed to influence all the respondents there.³² However, recognizing that W1 through W8 derived ongoing spiritual benefit from such media is not to say that media were a significant conversion factor. For the most part the women did not stress it.

It is also noteworthy that the four converts who emphasized the role of the media did not point to this factor in isolation.³³ They seemed to link Christian media to factors such as the truth of Jesus' message, Bible-reading, and the person of Jesus.³⁴ It may thus be said that a variety of media played an important yet largely supportive role in a minority of the conversions.

6.2.4 Personal crisis

Seven of the converts (i.e. about a third of those interviewed) stressed the significance of a personal crisis. The details of each one are unique, but slight similarities may be drawn between them. W2 and W3 emphasized a personal crisis in the context of answered prayer.³⁵ W2 was delivered from the midst of a serious medical condition, while W3 focused on her childhood disability and healing. The latter's earlier crisis influenced her conversion, since she recalled it in the light of remark-

³² W3 classified media as unimportant. However, after her conversion, she clearly valued the Jesus film. W4 through W8 said media were of medium importance although W4 may have influenced the others to say this. In any event, each of the home groups involving W1 through W8 used tapes for their regular meetings.

³³ There are five respondents if M1 is included.

³⁴ These prominent factors are all discussed in the next subsection.

³⁵ Answered prayer is discussed in more detail in the next subsection, in the context of God's miraculous involvement.

able spiritual developments at the same location (the Jesus place). Similarly, W10's ongoing crisis of childhood difficulties occurred before her conversion, but it was in and from this crucible that she turned to Christ.

M2 and M9 both turned to Christ in a context of personal desperation. M2 was driven by emptiness in his heart, whereas M9's spiritual pilgrimage came to its climax in the midst of hardships accompanying the first *intifada*.³⁶ M8's crisis also involved desperation, but of a more physical kind. He gave everything to the Lord when he was forced off the road. Physical danger characterized M11's crisis too. He was shot, but encountered Christ as he made a remarkable recovery from this ordeal. It seems unwise to attempt any further categorization of the seven crisis experiences relayed here. However, while a crisis could precede, accompany or culminate a conversion, each was significant for the individual concerned.

6.2.5 Community

The role of community may be seen in W2 and W7's accounts but it seems to be a broader phenomenon. The following pattern seems to emerge: seven of the eight women interviewees impacted by the ministry of the Jesus place (W2 through W8) said they were encouraged to believe by their family or community.³⁷ In addition, these seven denied the same community rejected them after their conversion (or association with the Jesus place, in W5's case). It may be granted W4's answers to the comprehensive questionnaire could have influenced those given by W5 through W8 (as noted above). However, such influence itself suggests a significant role played by community in their lives, even though the reliability of some of their answers is uncertain.

If the eighth woman impacted by the ministry of the Jesus place (W1) is included, a sub-group influenced by community might be discerned. Each story told by W1 through W8 features community in some way. It can at least be said their associations with the Jesus place came about through or in the presence of other (Muslim) women. Even

³⁶ It is interesting that M9 stressed personal crisis rather than political instability as the key element in this situation.

³⁷ In contrast, none of the men (apart from M1, whose conversion is dubious) said they were thus encouraged. (W9's experience is unlike that of W2 through W8 as she came from a different location and was encouraged by Christians, not Muslims, from her community.)

W1 (who was not encouraged by family or community to believe and felt rejected by her community thereafter) was told about the Jesus place by others and went there with them. It is thus probable that community played a more important role in the Christian involvement of W1 through W8 than emerges from their individual conversion stories. However, this would have to be demonstrated by further research in the location concerned. Such research should survey a number of groups (rather than individual converts) to test the strength of communal elements.³⁸ It might then be possible to determine the importance of community on the women's sub-group (i.e. W1 through W8) with greater certainty.

6.2.6 God's honor

Another factor requiring further research is God's honor. I thought that honor would feature prominently.³⁹ As it turned out, none of the converts placed an independent focus on God's honor in their narrations.⁴⁰ At the same time, each one agreed God honored Jesus by raising him from the dead, and all said they felt honored that Jesus would save them. This suggests two things: a biblical view of honor was not a conscious part of respondents' conversion experiences but the author's specific questions struck a chord with them.

In addition, ten of the interviewees responded to the words "God's honor" by citing this concept as a factor of great importance in their conversions. The Arabic term used, *اكرم الله* (*akram Allah*) gives the

³⁸ The possibility that a (female) people movement might be underway intrigued me during my visit, but this question lay beyond the scope of the study. Qualitative research on the matter would have to involve a longer study tour in the location concerned. Such a follow-up investigation should include visits to groups meeting at the Jesus place and in converts' homes. A range of differently-focused interviews should also be conducted. The latter could encompass samples of the women interviewed already, their male relatives, other women converts, male converts (who seemed to be present though not prominent), different workers from the Jesus place, nominal Christians and finally, both men and women from the larger unconverted Muslim community. This should give an idea of groups' involvement in and reaction to a local Christian movement. Such research would have to be undertaken with a great deal of care though and should not take place at all if it increased risks to the converts' lives.

³⁹ This was due to the key role assigned honor in Arab Muslim societies.

⁴⁰ W3 was the only one to assert that Jesus took the "shame" of sin from all peoples. Shame certainly contrasts with honor, but she did not volunteer the idea that God's honor led to her conversion.

idea of God being the most honorable, distinguished and noble.⁴¹ This designates a basic theological truth, and people from an Arab Muslim background would struggle to see God any differently. It is possible some of the ten interviewees lost sight of God's honor as a conversion factor here and strongly affirmed it simply because of its overall importance.⁴² Consequently, when I considered the ten converts' emphasis on God's honor in the light of all the information I gathered, it did not seem to be a key conversion factor for more than five of them (i.e. M2, M6, W1, W2 and W3).⁴³

The difficulty of discerning the role of God's honor lies in understanding what the converts meant by affirming it. Their stories barely touched on it and none of them showed a tendency to elaborate on the comprehensive questionnaire's honor-related items.⁴⁴ It is unlikely any of the converts carefully thought through a biblical theology of honor (as it contrasts to reputation). However, their unanimous agreement that God honored Jesus by raising him, which is not an Islamic idea, suggests they had some understanding of biblical honor. Clarity is thus lacking on the group's perceptions of God's honor and the role it played in their conversions. A different questionnaire, focused on the change in converts' understanding of

⁴¹ Eight of the ten concerned responded to this term, as they were interviewed in Arabic. The other two had university degrees and affirmed the English words "God's honor" without hesitation. It is not my impression that any distinction in meaning should be drawn between the English word "God" and the Arabic word "Allah" in this context. Arabic-speaking Christians call God "Allah". I do not suggest the absence of fundamental differences between deity in Christianity and in Islam. However, it seems both Christians and Muslims would readily affirm that God is supremely honorable.

⁴² This possibility is supported by the dearth of honor-related material in the conversion accounts. Converts were responding to my suggestions in the comprehensive questionnaire at this point, not telling their stories. As noted above, information from the comprehensive questionnaire was to verify and supplement the conversion stories. Where there is little support for a conversion element from the converts' own accounts, one should not make too much of the secondary affirmations.

⁴³ God's honor would probably have some significance for the other five (M4, M5, M8, M9 and W10), in addition to the seven respondents who said it was of medium importance. However, it is not clear what this significance might be.

⁴⁴ M11's willingness to reconsider that Jesus took the shame of his sin on the cross, after he expressed minimal disagreement with it, is the only exception. This points to his coming to terms with basic Christian theology but says little about his understanding of honor.

change in converts' understanding of honor from before to after their conversions, might yield more information.⁴⁵

6.3 Categories of greater prominence

We now turn to five conversion factors significant for majorities within the group, if not for the group as a whole. These are reading the Bible, the role of believers, the truth of Jesus' message, God's miraculous involvement, and the person of Jesus.

6.3.1 Reading the Bible

Bible-reading emerged as a key conversion factor for seven men (eight if M1 is included) and two women. This might point to a distinction between the men (most of whom emphasized this factor) and the women (a majority of who did not). Level of education seems to be more significant though. Most of the converts stressing this factor (i.e. M2, M3, M7, M8, M9 and W9) had at least high school behind them when they were converted. This probably made Bible-reading easier, although one of them, M3, said he struggled to understand the Bible when he first read it.

Margaret K. Nydell provides valuable background information to this subject. She notes the substantial difference between spoken and written (i.e. classical) Arabic, and the task facing anyone seeking to learn the latter: "The student must learn new words in Classical Arabic . . . and a whole new grammar, including case endings and new verb forms."⁴⁶ She adds that those 'who can read and write are still "functionally illiterate"' (unable to use the written language for more than rudimentary needs, such as signing one's name or reading signs) if they

⁴⁵ My 2003 research was focused on conversion stories with a view to discovering applicable conversion factors. Time did not permit a detailed exploration of all the elements, such as honor, which emerged from the comprehensive questionnaire but not from the stories. However, since the 2003 research identified converts who gave some prominence to God's honor, they would be potential candidates for suitable follow-up research. Without anticipating a formal research proposal, it would seem prudent to base such research on an open-ended questionnaire to obtain as much information as possible. Such a questionnaire could elicit converts' understandings of honor, shame and God along a timeline which encompassed the entire period of their conversion stories (i.e. from before to after their conversions).

⁴⁶ Margaret K. Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Westerners* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1987), p. 102.

have had only five or six years of schooling.⁴⁷ It thus seems unlikely converts with limited education would derive significant benefit from reading the Bible.

Three of those emphasizing Bible-reading, M5, M11 and W10, had not completed high school. This may be surprising, but unique circumstances suggest why they stressed it. M5 recognized the words from his childhood dream in the Bible and this probably motivated him to persevere in a life-changing reading experience. M11 did not seem to understand much from his initial (and intense) Bible-reading exercise.⁴⁸ However, he underwent a positive, life-changing experience as he read it and that impressed him deeply. W10 admitted her reading problems, but credited God's intervention with her ability to read the Bible over a period of time.⁴⁹ Her life also changed positively as she did so. It thus seems life-changing experiences were specifically linked to these converts' reading of the Bible.

The life-changing dimension of Bible-reading is not restricted to M5, M11 and W10. Those with greater educational advantages also pointed to it. M2 stressed that the Bible was not only true but alive as well, and his whole way of thinking changed. M3 did not get much out of the Bible at first, but this changed for the better through the agency of the Holy Spirit. M7 was attracted by the New Testament's focus on love but "something" pushed him to study more and he came to know God as his Father.⁵⁰ M8 spoke specifically of positive change in his life as he read the Scriptures. M9 read the New Testament intensely in the build-up to his definitive dream-like experience and he felt a thirst for it throughout that time. Finally, W9 could not get over the Bible's teaching on women and she called out to God in this context.

To summarize the evidence, it appears reading skills played a role in determining who might benefit from Bible-reading. At the same time, those with such skills did not benefit from it automatically, as the cases

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Reading for understanding was apparently not a primary goal. It is also noteworthy that the truth of Jesus' message was unimportant to him.

⁴⁹ W10 was apparently able to read some of the Qur'ān, as was M11, despite reading limitations. However, what they read was probably by way of recitation (without understanding) as this is commonly the way the Qur'ān is taught to Muslim children.

⁵⁰ Fellowship played a key role too, but it seems fair to understand the "something" which impelled him to keep reading the Bible as divine agency.

of M10 and W11 demonstrate.⁵¹ The nine converts emphasizing this factor were thus able to read the Bible with greater or lesser difficulty but were always moved by the experience. It was far more than an intellectual or information-gathering exercise.⁵² Essentially, each one had a transforming encounter with Christ, either in the midst of his or her Bible-reading or as a result of it. Reading the Bible thus constituted a crucial avenue of conversion for almost half the group as a whole.

6.3.2 Role of believers

The presence of a believer or believers was clearly important in a majority of the conversions. However, many individuals were involved and their roles varied from case to case. Some converts pointed to one believer in particular, while others identified several. Such believers included men and women, foreigners and locals. They were not part of a single group and it would seem most of them didn't know each other. Their influence ranged from the lives they lived and friendships they provided to the gospel they proclaimed.

Since the focus of the research is on conversions, the believers concerned are discussed in terms of the impact they made on the converts. Patterns are thus suggested on the basis of the converts' accounts rather than ministry strategies the believers may have had.⁵³ In addition, no mention is made of believers who played a less than primary role. Consequently, some of those introduced alphabetically above (as Believer A through Believer L) are omitted from the following discussion.⁵⁴ However, otherwise undesigned believers are mentioned if the converts' accounts require it.

⁵¹ Both were sufficiently well-educated at the time of their conversions to read the Bible without difficulty, M10 in English and W11 in Arabic, but neither stressed this factor.

⁵² M1 might be cited as an exception as he focused on differences one could see logically between the Bible and the Qur'ān. However, as noted above, evidence for a genuine conversion in his case is lacking.

⁵³ For the most part, I was not informed of ministry strategies. Separate qualitative research involving believers ministering to Palestinian Muslims would be necessary to determine such strategies. It might also be feasible to consider a follow-up research project in Israel/Palestine which evaluates ministry strategies in the light of conversion patterns.

⁵⁴ The research focuses on the converts (inter alia as they were impacted by Believers A through L). The focus is not on Believers A through L.

The role of believers applied equally to the men and the women, as six converts stressed this factor in each case (i.e. M3, M4, M5, M6, M7 and M9, and W1, W3, W4, W9, W10 and W11).⁵⁵ As suggested above, this categorization assumes M7's emphasis on fellowship underlines the role played by believers in his conversion. It is clear male believers influenced male converts in most cases.⁵⁶ However, most of the women converts were also influenced by men. Believer A played a key role in W1, W3 and W4's accounts and the genuine believer in W9's unpublished story was male. Even W10, who was particularly influenced by the German lady, Believer K, had a valuable discussion with the male evangelist Believer J.⁵⁷ There is thus a trend of male believers influencing both men and women.

The indication that men conducted an effective ministry to Muslim women is somewhat surprising. However, there is no hint in the women's testimonies of any impropriety involving male believers. The lives of these men apparently pointed directly to the Christ who transformed them, and the women noticed. It thus seems key male believers conducted themselves in such a way that women were not excluded from the positive impact of their ministries.⁵⁸

Gender considerations aside, it appears all converts concerned saw a (positively) different quality in the believers they encountered. M3 described Believer C as having something special about her. M4 noticed how Believer E changed for the better. M5 loved the moral purity of believers. M6 loved Christians from childhood, as they were different from Muslims. M7 was moved by the Christian fellowship he saw and experienced in Believer H's home. M9 saw something different in Christians, particularly their gentleness, mercy, devotion and love. W1

⁵⁵ If M1 and W5 are included, the number would increase to seven men and seven women. M1 and W5 were certainly influenced by believers, although it appears this influence didn't lead to true conversion for the former, or to complete conversion for the latter.

⁵⁶ M3 is the only clear exception as he was significantly influenced by the two German women, Believers C and D.

⁵⁷ In contrast, W11 stressed the role played by her (female) friend Believer L, but was not helped by the manipulative male preacher at the Christian conference.

⁵⁸ It is probable that male believers seeking to impact Muslims in Israel/Palestine outnumbered females. If so, this could account for the larger number of influential male believers in the stories. However, this cannot be determined in the absence of focused research on the subject.

was drawn by believers' love and faith. W3 was moved by Believer A's prayers, teaching and practical assistance. W4 was influenced by Believer A's prayers and teaching.⁵⁹ W9 emphasized the difference between the genuine believer who spoke to her and nominal Christians she had known before.⁶⁰ W10 came under the loving influence of Christians. Finally, W11 was befriended and assisted by Believer L. It would seem the essence of this factor, for the majority who stressed it, was the caliber of believers' lives. Among other elements of significance, this led them to Christ.

6.3.3 Truth of Jesus' message

Sixteen respondents (including M8, with his focus on assurance) underlined the truth of Jesus' message as an important conversion factor. The eight men and eight women concerned specifically indicated this factor's significance in their coming to Christ. However, each one pointed to its importance differently in their stories.⁶¹ Details from their individual accounts are thus set out in the following paragraphs.

Several respondents desired to know more and found what they sought in the truth of Jesus' message. M2's curiosity about Christianity was satisfied when he discovered that the Bible, with its focus on Christ, was true. M7's longing to know the truth was met as he studied the Bible in a context of Christian fellowship. W1 was curious to know more about Jesus and came to faith in him through the ministry of the Jesus place. W7's curiosity and desire to know more about Jesus was also satisfied through the teaching of the Jesus place. On the other hand, M9 and M10 knew something of the truth before their conversions, but didn't apprehend it at once. The former understood Christianity's essential message but only accepted it when he had his dream-

⁵⁹ W1 was also influenced by Believer A. His prominence is not surprising, since his ministry impacted nine of the twenty-two interviewees. Interestingly though, his American origins do not receive undue emphasis. One also gains a balanced overall picture of the roles played by foreign and local believers. Thus M5, W1, W3 and W4 were largely influenced by Americans, M3 and W10 by Germans, M4, M6, W9 and W11 by Palestinians, and M7 and M9 by individuals of uncertain origin.

⁶⁰ This detail is drawn from W9's unpublished story.

⁶¹ As noted above, key conversion factors, such as the truth of Jesus' message, are drawn from all the information received from converts. They are not drawn from the comprehensive questionnaire alone.

like experience. The latter instinctively knew the message of Jesus was true, despite his determination to be a good Muslim. However, he did not embrace it until his Easter Saturday encounter with Christ.

In addition to their longing and curiosity, M7, W1 and W7 emphasized the contexts in which they discovered the truth about Jesus. Others did too. M4 benefited from the ministry of Christian youth meetings (where people's lives were different). M6 learned about Jesus in meetings with Believer G, following his "after midnight" experience. W4 had been influenced by Catholic Christianity but spoke of the truth she received from Believer A (from the Jesus place) and the tapes he gave her. W6 was influenced by the teaching of the Jesus place as well.

Other respondents highlighted the effect the discovery of Jesus' truth had on them. M5 found his interest in the Bible grew. He experienced it as spiritual food and loved Jesus more and more. M8 read the Bible and Christian literature, found his mind changing and felt he had found something he lost. This solidified into a firm assurance after he was forced off the road. W2 learned about Jesus and this influenced her to the point she insisted on the truth of Christ's resurrection in the presence of a dissenting relative. W3 was moved by the crucial understanding that Jesus was the Savior who took the shame of sin from all the peoples of the world. W8's knowledge of God's grace was central to her conversion (and to her ongoing Christian life). Finally, W9 was deeply affected by Jesus' teaching on women.

Summarizing the above, it appears some had a prior curiosity or desire for the truth about Jesus. However, they all discovered the truth about him, whether they were consciously seeking it or not. Discoveries took place in different contexts through different means (including believers, Christian media and the Bible). Despite this variety, the converts each discovered Jesus' message was true.⁶² Only some converts spoke specifically of the effects of the truth. Nevertheless, in the deepest sense the truth of Jesus' message affected them all: it contributed

⁶² For the most part, converts' discovery of the truth was a matter of recognizing its veracity, not weighing it up against Islam. This doesn't imply they failed to consider the Christian truths they heard. The implications of these truths are always far-reaching. However, since rejection of Islam is not a prominent conversion factor, their attraction to Jesus' truth should probably be seen independently of their turning from the tenets of Islam.

significantly to sixteen encounters with Christ and their lives were transformed.

6.3.4 God's miraculous involvement

Fourteen converts emphasized God's miraculous involvement. As suggested above, M3's focus on the Holy Spirit and M7's discovery of God as his Father could be included under this factor. In this case, the number would increase to sixteen. However, each of these eight men and eight women experienced God's miraculous involvement differently. The following paragraphs draw broad trends from the converts' unique experiences of this prominent factor, without forcing any of them into a predetermined pattern.⁶³

Several of those stressing God's miraculous involvement had experiences which impressed them. M5 was deeply moved by his childhood vision when he realized it contained the words he read in the Bible many years later. M11 experienced miraculous healing when he read the Bible. W3 was deeply impressed by experiences of God's power associated with the Jesus place over a period of time. W6 was moved by miraculous answers to prayer in the provision of a new job and a new home, and her daughter's healing. W7 saw prayer answered on behalf of her husband and experienced significant improvements in her life. W8 experienced personal healing in response to another believer's prayer.⁶⁴ However, in each case conversion was the result.

Others pointed to God's miraculous involvement in changing them personally. M2 was positively transformed by the power of God and his family couldn't ignore the immediate change in his life. M3's step-by-step conversion culminated in the Holy Spirit giving him the faith and love he sought and confirming he was a true believer. M4 became a lot less aggressive as a result of Jesus miraculously changing his life. M7 eagerly received God as his spiritual Father and his character was transformed. W4 demonstrated miraculous change in her life in the

⁶³ The veracity of each conversion is discussed above. However, I cannot verify the accounts of divine involvement independently and so relay the converts' perspectives at face value.

⁶⁴ Almost all the respondents were influenced by answered prayer. W9 was the only one to disagree that answered prayer led to her conversion, but her unpublished story makes it clear she was converted in a context where she called out to God. Another researcher might make more of answered prayer. However, I prefer to see it as one of several examples of God's miraculous involvement in converts' lives.

way she came to accept the loss of her six children. W10 was wonderfully transformed and delivered from her difficult background through God's intervention.

The others who underlined God's miraculous involvement had experiences which both impressed and changed them. M9 came to Christ in a dream-like experience in which he felt peace and comfort and was convicted he should believe. M10 had an explosive experience of the Holy Spirit which transformed his character and led him to confess Jesus as the Son of God. W1 was moved by answered prayer and experienced love and faith as Jesus miraculously changed her life. W11 encountered Christ in her dream but only accepted his deity through a miraculous change within.

In some ways the experiences of the group discussed here typify all the converts. Conversion is a transformation-producing encounter with Christ. Such an encounter would certainly impress a convert and lead to change in his or her life. These elements, of (divine) impression and change, thus apply to all true conversions whether the converts use the "right words" for the experience or not. It therefore comes as no surprise that God's miraculous involvement (i.e. transforming encounter) emerges as a factor of major significance for sixteen of the Palestinians.⁶⁵ At the same time, the uniqueness of each experience must not be forgotten. By its very nature, God's miraculous involvement is a product of God himself. While he remains the same and the nature of conversion remains the same, he deals with each individual differently.

Before moving to the last factor of major prominence, an aspect closely linked to God's miraculous involvement merits attention. A number of respondents had dreams or dream-like experiences associated with their conversions. Some related the experiences as parts of their conversion stories. Others only mentioned them when asked (in the comprehensive questionnaire), after completing their stories. Suggestions on the implications of this phenomenon are as follows:

For M3, M5, M6, M9, M10, M11 and W11, dream-like experiences were integral to their stories. M3 saw himself receiving the faith and

⁶⁵ The emphasis given this factor is also in accord with the importance Palestinians attach to the supernatural. I anticipated respondents would be amenable to God's miraculous involvement in their lives. However, this is not to say the converts' experiences are a product of local folk superstition. Rather it suggests they recognize God's supernatural activity readily when it occurs.

love he prayed for in his “movie in the Spirit”. M5’s childhood vision of angels was of major significance to his later conversion. M6 concluded that Jesus came to him in his “after midnight” experience.⁶⁶ M9 confessed his faith in Christ when a sense of peace and comfort came over him. M10’s conversion was marked by an inner explosion as “the Spirit of God landed on top of him.” M11 had several dreams, culminating in a dream of conviction which led to his life-changing Bible-reading experience. Finally, W11’s vision of Jesus pointing at her heart played a key role in her conversion.

Most of these dream-like experiences took place when the individuals were awake. This would have emphasized their extraordinary nature to the converts. However, apart from the subjects’ state of consciousness, each was convinced the experience wasn’t self-generated but supernatural. In addition, all the visions concerned played an important role in the respondents’ conversions. It thus makes sense they included these details in their stories.⁶⁷

On the other hand, M4, M8, W1, W2, W3, W4, W8 and W10 did not mention their dreams of their own accord. It would seem many of these dreams, though related to their conversions in some way, were less significant. M4’s vision of Jesus, which occurred when his parents kicked him out of the house, was certainly encouraging. However, as noted above, it confirmed rather than effected his conversion. This might be why he omitted it from his story.⁶⁸ Similarly, W10’s dream, in which Jesus assured her of his love, apparently played a supportive role in her conversion. She clearly valued it, but may have left it out at first

⁶⁶ M6 disagreed he had a dream leading him to Jesus. This is probably because he was awake at the time of his “after midnight” experience and saw it as a real occurrence. However, since others (like M3, M9, M10 and W11) had similar experiences, it seems appropriate to call it “dream-like”.

⁶⁷ Given the prominence of M6’s “after midnight” experience, one might include him with the others who emphasized God’s miraculous involvement. This factor undoubtedly played a role and M6 said God acting miraculously in his life was of medium importance to his trusting Christ. However, whether M6 is included under this category or not, there is no doubt God’s miraculous involvement is of high significance for the group as a whole.

⁶⁸ M4 has another dream in which he was pulled out of a hole. It would seem this dream was an encouraging confirmation of his conversion as well.

because she was concentrating on the remarkable physical, mental and social details of her conversion.⁶⁹

The dreams acknowledged by the others received even less emphasis. None of the converts concerned was interested in elaborating on the details. However, they are set out briefly as follows: M8 dreamed he was sitting on a carpet, which took him to a light above him. W1 dreamed she was in a church with candles. W2 couldn't remember the content of her dream but said Believer A helped her understand it at the time. W3 had a dream about a snake and water which Believer A interpreted in the light of Jesus.⁷⁰ W4 felt exhausted after dreaming she had an injection between the eyes, but she felt better after Believer A prayed for her.⁷¹ Finally, W8 did not communicate the content of a dream she had.

The latter dreams were significant enough for the converts to mention them when questioned. This might reflect the high regard dreams enjoy in Islamic contexts. At the same time, these dreams seem quite ordinary, as they took place in the normal way (i.e. during sleep) and life-changing encounters are absent. However, timing could account for the impression they made on the converts. That would certainly apply if they accompanied more important (conversion related) developments in the converts' lives. In that case, they would fulfill a supportive (though not primary) role in respondents' conversion experiences. This could explain why the converts omitted them from the stories but could recall them, with varying levels of success, when prompted to do so.

⁶⁹ M4, W10 and W11 were the only ones to speak of visions of Jesus himself. (M6 and M10 are excluded, as their experiences were more indirect. M6 spoke of "something" coming into his heart which he later identified as Jesus while M10 said it was "as if" Jesus entered the room.) None of them elaborated on Jesus' physical appearance although W10 said he was clothed in white (and accompanied by two children). Instead, they focused on what he did. Thus Jesus covered M4 and told him he'd never leave him, told W10 he loved her, and pointed at W11's heart. It is impossible to determine the exact nature of these experiences. However, they seem to be broadly in accord with the New Testament's approach of concentrating on Jesus' actions rather than his appearance.

⁷⁰ This dream should not be confused with the dream someone else had of her arriving at the Jesus place, dressed in black. Hearing about that dream impressed her deeply, as noted above.

⁷¹ In this case, the prayer rather than the dream held significance for her.

Conclusions may now be drawn from the varying emphases converts placed on their dreams. The experience of a conversion-related dream (or dream-like event) was not automatically of high significance. Seven of the converts concerned included these experiences in their stories, but eight did not.⁷² The former were in no doubt the experiences constituted God's intervention, leading to their conversions. However, while the latter would acknowledge God's working in their dreams, they experienced the decisive impact of his intervention in other areas. Put differently, dreams or dream-like experiences were especially significant only when they were a primary vehicle for a convert's transforming encounter with Christ.

6.3.5 Person of Jesus

The most significant conversion factor is the person of Jesus. Every respondent emphasized him, without exception.⁷³ This is not surprising, given the nature of conversion. He is the one to whom individuals turn in humble surrender and encounter by the power of God. Without the person of Jesus, there is no conversion. However, converts did not emphasize his person out of duty. He inevitably played a key role in each conversion experience. The following paragraphs consequently convey his crucial position by relaying essential though different details from each conversion account.

Some of the converts pointed to an element of knowledge associated with their encounters with Jesus. M3's step-by-step process of coming to Jesus concluded with the realization he was truly a believer in Christ. M7 found God as his Father when he came to know the Christ of the New Testament. M8 was convinced that the Christ who died for him was worth living for. W2 was urged by God's Spirit to follow Jesus, and her desire to know more about him and benefit from him was satisfied. W3 accepted the crucial truth that Jesus was the Savior who took away the shame of sin. W7's desire to know more about Jesus was sat-

⁷² It is of passing interest that most of those including them were men, while most of those omitting them were women. However, gender differences should not be overstressed. It would seem the converts' assessments of the supernatural life-changing impact (or otherwise) of their dream experiences determined whether they included them in their stories or not.

⁷³ Even M1 and W5, whose conversions are questionable, underlined this factor. Both seemed to lack transforming encounters with Christ, but M1 clearly regarded Jesus positively while W5 displayed a continued interest in learning more about him.

isfied through the teaching of the Jesus place. W9's questions (from reading the Bible) led her to call out to God and she found herself praising Jesus.⁷⁴

Other converts described their encounters with Jesus largely in the terminology of love. M5 came to love Jesus more and more through reading the Bible. M6 loved Jesus through his "after midnight" experience and what he learned thereafter. M10 loved Jesus but came to know him in a dramatic encounter the night before Easter. W1 was drawn to Jesus by love and faith. W4 underlined the importance of Jesus' person in the loving environment of the Jesus place. W10 opened her heart to the Jesus who loved her and experienced his peace. W11 loved Jesus (after her dream) and accepted his deity when she surrendered herself to God on his terms.

Others focused more on the experiences they had in encountering Jesus. M2 was transformed for all to see when Jesus took the place of preeminence in his life. M4 changed remarkably when he opened his heart and accepted Jesus into his life. M9 was moved by the person of Jesus and put his faith in him with great emotion. M11 turned to the person of Jesus through the miraculous healing he experienced when he read the Bible. W6 emphasized Jesus' person against a backdrop of God's miraculous work in her life. W8 felt the mercy and grace of God as a result of trusting Jesus.

The elements of knowledge, love and experience suggested here are not mutually exclusive. They simply present different aspects of the converts' encounters with Jesus. The details are different in each case, but the person of Jesus is central. He is the one who holds it all together. His person is the most important factor of all.

7 Presentation of the Palestinians' conversion patterns

7.1 Research results

The conversion factors discussed above incorporate and clarify the information set out in Table 1. The individuals' factors identified there are not presented in any particular order. However, this section has examined the factors as their prominence varies for the group as a whole. Table 2 thus shows the core conversion factors of the men and the

⁷⁴ This detail is drawn from W9's unpublished conversion account.

women as they range from greater to lesser prominence for all the interviewees.⁷⁵

7.2 The Palestinians' core conversion factors

A number of general conclusions may now be drawn from the patterns of the Palestinians' conversions. There is no question of a single factor applying exclusively to any convert. Each individual was significantly influenced by several conversion factors. However, some factors are more prominent than others.⁷⁶ The most significant are the person of Jesus, God's miraculous involvement, the truth of Jesus' message, and the role of believers. Each of these applies to a majority of the converts.

These significant factors also apply evenly to the men and the women. Thus no gender differentiation colors the broad picture of the Palestinian Muslim conversions. Although Bible reading applies to more men than women, this probably reflects education levels, not gender differences. There are other minor differences between the men and the women too. However, none of these alters the significance of Jesus' person, God's involvement, Jesus' truth, and believers' roles.

In sum, the panoramic picture of the Palestinian Muslim conversions has the person of Jesus at the center. The converts are drawn to him through differing means. These are God's miraculous involvement, the truth of his message, believers' roles, Bible reading and an array of other factors. However, Jesus is always central. This is the broad pattern emerging from my research.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Community and God's honor are listed at the end of Tables 3 and 4 because their importance cannot adequately be determined in the absence of further research. By the same token, no attempt is made to suggest the number of the converts who would stress these factors if more information were available.

⁷⁶ Attention is given to overall prominence rather than factors' exact position in ranking order. As noted above, a different analyst might evaluate them slightly differently. Taken together though, there is no doubt which factors enjoy greater prominence, with the person of Jesus heading them all.

⁷⁷ In my dissertation I compare my findings to published material on, and missionary assessments of Palestinian Muslim converts, and to a control study involving ten converts from Islam in Bangladesh. These sources suggest my findings are broadly consistent with others.

8 Missions to Muslims: confirmations, a misconception and a discovery

W11	x		x		x							
W10	x		x		x	x	x			x		
W9	x			x	x	x						
W8	x		x	x								
W7	x		x	x								
W6	x		x	x								
W5	x				x							
W4	x		x	x	x							
W3	x		x	x	x		x					
W2	x			x			x	x				
W1	x		x	x	x			x				
M11	x		x			x	x					
M10	x		x	x				x				
M9	x		x	x	x	x	x					
M8	x			x		x	x	x		x		
M7	x		x	x	x	x						
M6	x			x	x				x		x	
M5	x		x	x	x	x						
M4	x		x	x	x				x		x	
M3	x		x		x	x						
M2	x		x	x		x	x					
M1	x				x	x		x				
	Person of Jesus								x			
	God's miraculous involvement											
	Truth of Jesus' message											
	Role of believers											
	Reading the Bible											
	Personal crisis											
	Christian media											
	Rejection of Islam											
	Political instability											
	Community											
	God's honor											

Table 2 Core conversion factors

As implied at the beginning of this study, considerable barriers, including the risk of martyrdom, inhibit conversions to Christ in the Muslim world. These certainly apply to Palestinian Muslims and a majority of the male converts surveyed there experienced or feared death threats. Those engaging in mission to Muslims will appreciate this is a difficult

enterprise, risky to converts' lives in many locations. Despite the difficulties, Muslim conversions do occur. Conversion is identified as the process of transformation which occurs as an individual turns to Christ in humble surrender, encountering him by the power of God. Each Palestinian convert's account is analyzed in the light of this understanding and most seem genuine. Since the nature of conversion is constant, it should apply equally to Muslims (and others) claiming conversion elsewhere.

While conversion remains the same, different factors are instrumental in Muslims turning to Christ. Each conversion has its own characteristics. However, as I have just demonstrated, my research confirms certain factors occur more often than others. They all occur in the literature on Muslim conversions and will not be unfamiliar. Nevertheless, the way in which they operate may be seen as follows:

A divine/human synergy is involved. Converts encounter the person of Jesus by the power of God. He has to act for conversion to occur. However, believers have a crucial role to play in pointing Muslims to Jesus. Quite simply, they do so by presenting the biblical truth about him. Where literacy is a problem, the Bible's testimony to Jesus may be presented via other means.⁷⁸ This communicative process will probably be lengthy, but believers' consistency and sincerity are essential.⁷⁹ At the same time those who convert are only transformed as they sincerely turn to Jesus. In sum, the Jesus they encounter has the last word on which factors bring their conversions about. He has the exclusive prerogative on when he might intervene miraculously but he certainly uses the other factors as well. Missionaries must do their part, but the Lord coordinates the details. Consequently, one should never move from dependence on him.

It seems true to assert that each conversion is remarkable as it entails a transforming encounter with Jesus. However, this does not mean most Muslim converts were deeply committed to Islam beforehand. Wider research does not reveal a pattern of particularly strong Muslims becoming believers. Some passionate Muslims do turn to Christ, but

⁷⁸ Other media (which must be biblical throughout) may be particularly useful in Arabic-speaking environments where those with a basic literacy in their own language nevertheless struggle to read the Bible with adequate understanding.

⁷⁹ Missiologists will be aware of the Engel scale and other scholars' models which indicate that conversion is a process. A good deal of patience is thus required.

missionaries should not expect many converts to come from their number.

Most converts demonstrate a weak pre-conversion commitment to and involvement in Islam. This might imply Muslims have to go a step further and reject Islam before they are converted. This is a misconception though. Few come to Christ because they reject their religion. The evidence suggests such rejection occurs independently, or subsequent to converts' encounters with Jesus. Major conversion patterns I discerned do not show Muslims turning to Christ because they believe Islam is wrong. Accordingly, missionaries desiring to see converts should not attack Islam but should concentrate on pointing Muslims to Jesus instead.⁸⁰

Finally, missiologists might find my discovery on dreams useful. Less than half the fifteen Palestinian respondents mentioning dream-like experiences did so of their own accord. Those doing so reflected the key role the experiences played in their conversions. The others associated dreams with their conversions but did not experience them as life-changing encounters. Consequently, dreams or dream-like experiences only stand out when they are a primary vehicle for a convert's transforming encounter with Christ. This insight on the Palestinian Muslims' dreams may not be mirrored exactly elsewhere, as other researchers will record the incidence of converts' dreams (and other phenomena) differently. However, it seems fair to claim the sheer presence or absence of a dream-like experience is unimportant. The essential element to look for is a convert's transforming encounter with Christ.

⁸⁰ This is not to deny the importance of apologetics. Missionaries, converted Muslims and others must understand Christianity and Islam clearly. However, anti-Islamic polemics do not play a major role in Muslims coming to Christ.

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