

A critique of discipleship methods and pastoral provision for followers of Christ from a Muslim background in the British church.

This is dedicated to John and Anne Dyer, my unofficial adopted parents. May God bless you for the way you have cared for me and for the safe space you provided for so many years. May God raise many more like you to care for people like me!

I am eternally grateful to Colin Chapman, Tim Green and Philippa Grimes for their encouragement.

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to critique current discipleship methods and pastoral provision for BMBs within the British church context. The methodology involved evaluating mainly text based sources, interviewing six church leaders and providing insight from the author's own context.

Consequences of following Christ

According to several experts in Islam and BMB¹ discipleship, the number of Muslims choosing to follow Christ is increasing in Britain.² Some are rejected or ostracised by their family and some manage the tensions of being the first follower of Christ. Others have to manage complexities within family and community with little or no guidance. A few choose to be secret believers which according to some experts stunts their discipleship.³

A new identity

There are also identity issues that arise in following an Eastern faith which is dispensed through a Western lens resulting in a type of pre-packaged theology. Some BMB's change their names, style of dress and diet to be accepted. There are also many British BMBs who are culturally Western who would not view the Western church lens as a barrier to the development of their faith. Subsequently, the British BMB may reject one's own cultural heritage in order to follow Christ.

There are also pastoral issues with regards to rejection and isolation from their family and community. After being a member of a community and family, to be thrust into a (mainly white) Western church has often led to isolation for many BMBs. However, there are a small number of examples where Christian leaders have tried to accommodate for this loss by providing practical help and pastoral care.⁴

Discipleship Methods

These complexities can be managed effectively by those involved in the discipleship and pastoral care of BMBs if methods are reviewed. Current discipleship methods and resources need to be contextualised when nurturing BMBs as is the practice with the leaders interviewed for this dissertation.⁵ For these reasons, the author has critiqued four different discipleship resources.

The role of the church

For a Muslim, there is a sense of belonging in the Ummah⁶ but its influence should not be underestimated.⁷ For so many BMBs the church has not been the community they expected it to be as they may have been looking to replace the Ummah. Just like the Ummah however, the church can experience both unity and disunity. This dissertation also critiques the role of the British church.

¹ BMB is the term used to refer to converts from Islam: Believer's from a Muslim Background.

² Bishop Toby Howarth in www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/05/european-churches-growing-flock-muslim-refugees-converting-Christianity (accessed on 21.03.2017)

³ Dr Tim Green an expert on BMB Discipleship and author of several Discipleship resources including 'Joining the Family' (which is critiqued in this dissertation) mentions this. (See Bibliography)

⁴ Jemima Partridge disciples a community of BMB's in the South West of England (see appendix). P46

⁵ See appendix – Interviews. PP 42-48

⁶ Ummah: world-wide community of Muslims.

⁷ Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten portraying the prophet as a terrorist in 2005 is demonstrative of its influence. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/4677976.stm> (accessed on 27.05.17)

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A critique of discipleship methods and pastoral provision for followers of Christ from a Muslim background in the British church.

Introduction

There are over 3,046,607 Muslims living in England and Wales according to the Office for National statistics.⁸ An increasing number are following Christ and though reliable statistics are not yet available for this as it is deemed to be sensitive data, experts such as Dr Kathryn Kraft and +Toby Howarth affirm this trend.⁹ Church history and in particular, the history of the British church illustrates an ability to survive transition; but Muslims following Christ in such large numbers is a relatively new phenomenon especially in light of migration trends. For these reasons it would be appropriate to review current discipleship methods and pastoral care undertaken in nurturing Believers from Muslim Backgrounds (BMBs) as they represent a unique situation. The desire within some British Churches to see Muslims accept Christ may be inspired by a certain interpretation of the *missio Dei*.¹⁰ Or perhaps it may be based on the fear of Islam; Brother Andrew uses terminology such as 'jihad' and names several 'Islamic' terrorist groups which seem to be a part of the inspiration for proclamation.¹¹ There are however, a number of evangelical groups who seek to proclaim the love of Christ to Muslims through their interest in Islamic culture who are keen to provide appropriate discipleship and pastoral care. This dissertation attempts to address the issue of BMB discipleship and pastoral care through a critique of current approaches. It is also a comment on the role of the British church with respect to the above.

The reason for this dissertation topic is not only because of the author's experience of being a BMB in the British church, but also because trends show that many Muslims have encountered Jesus in dramatic ways for which there has been little guidance on discipleship and pastoral care.¹² The growth of same culture churches such as the Iranian Church in Britain or South Asian Fellowships suggest that the British English-speaking Church alone may not yet be equipped to disciple and pastor BMBs. This may be for a variety of reasons including significant cultural differences, lack of knowledge, time constraints, fear of the unknown and even prejudice to mention but a few. The British church will be enriched if they are open to new learning in areas of discipleship and pastoral care of BMBs with the support of experts who have worked with Muslims and BMBs either in the UK or in Muslim-majority countries.

According to Davison, there are clear biblical guidelines when inaugurating a new Christian into a community of believers.¹³ However, texts that were inspired by the culture of the Ancient Near East on discipleship interpreted through a Western lens are a type of disservice to the BMB population. When first century Jews became Disciples of Christ, they were inaugurated into a community of believers who had first-hand experience of what it was to be persecuted and dislocated from their

⁸ Annual Population Survey Data for England and Wales showing population and of that those, that reported their religion as Muslim for 2011 to 2014

⁹ Dr Kathryn Kraft (UCL) 2013. "'Coming Out' as a Faith Changer: Experiences of Faith Declaration for Arabs of a Muslim Background who Choose to Follow a Christian Faith." in *Transformation*, 30:2. +Toby of Bradford <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk/tags/toby-howarth> (accessed on 28.05.17)

¹⁰ "...mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world." D. Bosch. *Transforming Mission*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1991) p.519.

¹¹ A Janssen, *Secret Believers*, (Grand Rapids: Revell 2007). P7-9.

¹² <http://answering-islam.org/Testimonies/> (accessed on 21.03.2017)

¹³ A. Davison & A Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. (SCM Press: London, 2010). P14-15

original communities. For BMBs there are parallels with the Jewish experience of following Christ; some are ostracised by their families, some suffer persecution whilst others are able to manage the tensions between following Christ and maintaining relationships. There are also significant pastoral implications for BMBs. These complexities are generally alien to the inherited model of church and academics such as Davison and Milbank who defend 'form and content' seem to shy away from the reality of a changing faith landscape in the UK.¹⁴ Adaptation or reordering the churches priority may provide a more constructive response in relation to the increasing number of Muslims choosing to follow Christ. As well as adapting to culture, the church could do well to cultivate a more bespoke, contextualised approach to discipleship as has been demonstrated by Green¹⁵ and Chapman.¹⁶

Whilst a range of discipleship approaches exist for new Christians in the UK, most are of a generic nature. Moreover, the BMB discipleship resources that do exist have often been created without their collaboration. The purpose of this dissertation is to critique discipleship material and comment on their suitability to BMBs. The pastoral provision or guidance for the same group appears to be skeletal in many cases. This may be due to a lack of cultural awareness within church leaderships, alternative priorities and even xenophobia in the midst of the refugee crisis. Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11 these contributory factors have made for a challenging missional and interfaith landscape.¹⁷ Western media has exploited public fear and assisted in demonizing Islam both in North America and in Europe. Islam was and is seen by some right wing evangelical Christians as a threat to Western society.¹⁸ Formerly, there was recognition that from a missionary and interfaith perspective, it was important to develop a more contextualised approach when working with Muslims.¹⁹ These approaches included sometimes using the Arabic term Allah²⁰ and teaching new BMBs to worship in the style of practising Muslims. Today there is much apprehension in the Western world in relation to these matters.

Since the events of 9/11 and subsequent events as well as the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the form of ISIS,²¹ there has been a sense of urgency amongst some Christian organisations to 'win converts' from Islam.²² It is perhaps out of fear that some evangelism programmes are put in place without much thought about discipleship; a type of unethical evangelism has emerged.²³ There appears to be a gap in the area of BMB discipleship and pastoral care in the British church in the experience of most BMBs including the author's and the interviews in the appendix also demonstrate the need for a more contextualised resource.²⁴ Nevertheless, despite this broad picture of the lack in some British Churches, communities whose leadership have a specific interest in BMB discipleship and pastoral care do exist and even thrive.

¹⁴ A. Davison & A. Milbank, *For the Parish*, (London: SCM Press 2010) P1-27

¹⁵ T. Green, *Joining the Family* (multi-media discussion course), (Milton Keynes: Kitab, 2016)

¹⁶ C. Chapman, *The Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenges of Islam*, (Leicester: IVP, 1999)

¹⁷ J. Ralston, *Bearing witness: Reframing Christian-Muslim encounter in light of the refugee crisis* in *Theology Today*, No.1 Vol.74 (April 2017) P22 -35.

¹⁸ J. Smith in *Between Naivety and Hospitality*, eds., C Chapman & S Bell (UK: Authentic Media Ltd, 2011), P237.

¹⁹ <https://www.thepeopleofthebook.org/about/strategy/c1-c6-spectrum/> (acsssd on 15.05.17)

²⁰ Some Christians cannot accept the Arabic name for God: Allah, as it carries a description of characteristics that are not aligned with their understanding of Agape love.

²¹ Islamic State in Syria

²² Mohammed Abu-Nimer & D. Augsburg, Eds. *Peace-Building By, Between, and Beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*. (UK: Lexington Books 2010) P179.

²³ ABWE (American Baptists for World Evangelization) partners in Birmingham, UK are encouraged to deliver tracts in mainly Muslim areas for example

²⁴ See appendix. P42-48

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this dissertation is to critique discipleship and pastoral provision for BMBs within the British Church. The fieldwork drew on a combination of two tracks:

- The author's own evaluation and critique of four selected discipleship courses;
- Interviews with carefully selected specialist practitioners to test the author's ideas against their opinions.

The author's critique is from a gender-sensitive liberationist perspective. This is based on the author's stance as an Anglican Clergywoman from a Muslim Background (BMB) and the life experience this has given.

The author's critique of four discipleship resources forms a significant part of this dissertation. The following were critiqued:

- The Alpha Course²⁵
- Growing in Hope²⁶
- Come Follow Me²⁷
- Joining the Family²⁸

Triangulation: The author cross-checked her own perspective against the views and experience of leaders involved with the discipleship of BMBs in Britain. The interviews were with six leaders all of whom had some specialist knowledge of Islam and who adopted a range of discipleship methods and used a variety of resources and methods. The information collected from the interviews with church leaders were presented in the appendices.

The interviewees consisted of white male leaders, white female leaders and non-white female leaders. These phone interviews took place over a space of 3 weeks.

The limitations of the combined fieldwork work were:

- Time constraints.
- Limited availability of subject specific resources.
- Availability of leaders who had a specific interest in BMB work.
- The author's bias for theology from a liberationist perspective and a preference for gender neutral resources.
- The author's preference for a more contextualised theology emanating from the Fresh Expressions movement.²⁹

The Ethical considerations included anonymising names of interviewees and the churches or organisations they were connected to.

²⁵ Associated with Holy Trinity Brompton, London.

²⁶ A. Reddie, *Growing into Hope*, (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1998)

²⁷ T. Green. *Come Follow Me*, (UK: Lulu Publishing, 2013)

²⁸ T. Green, & Roxy, *Joining the Family*, (multi-media) (Milton Keynes: Kitab, 2016)

²⁹ CofE Mission & Public Affairs Council, *Mission-Shaped Church*, (Church House Publishing, London, 2004)

Chapter 1

Background

Muslims, whether they are for instance, third generation British Asian or first generation Sudanese, share a culture in common with a Bible that reflects the culture(s) of the Ancient Near East. Specialists like Chapman would concur.³⁰ However experts like Chapman are in the minority and equipping mainstream British Churches such as the Church of England, has presented a challenge.³¹ A Christian's stance on salvific history, the *missio Dei*, the Christ event and the interpretation of 'The Great Commission' will determine how evangelism is conducted and more specifically the teaching material used in the discipleship of new BMB's.

Whether one accepts 'The Great Commission' or how one interprets the following scripture can and has led to a plethora of outcomes throughout the history of the church:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you..."³²

Conversion

With new studies in migration, there is an influx of Muslims converting from Islam to Christianity.³³ Bishop Toby Howarth of Bradford is involved in an increasing number of BMB baptisms and confirmations; on average 1 in 4 confirmations are that of BMBs.³⁴ Some theologians may question the term 'conversion.' Karl Rahner uses the term 'anonymous Christians'³⁵ suggesting that purely by God's grace they are already followers of Jesus Christ. Compare this with the Muslim notion that all are born Muslims.³⁶ Other theologians might suggest that as Muslims are part of the Abrahamic covenant,³⁷ conversion is unnecessary; that Muslims may eventually come to the realisation of a more complete understanding of the God of the Trinity. Others would stipulate that there has to be a clear encounter with Christ, a type of Damascus road encounter in order for there to be a real conversion experience – a metanoia experience.³⁸ Davison and Milbank state:

"Conversion is rebirth, but it is also the reformation of prejudices and the growth of Christian character. Conversion is the reordering of the way we think, live and associate."³⁹

³⁰ Colin Chapman – expert and author of numerous books in relation to interfaith dialogue. See bibliography.

³¹ The author has witnessed Chapman being challenged by conservative evangelical ordinands who had taken Islam as an elective for his contextualised approach to Islam and Christian mission.

³² NRSV, Matthew 28:18-20 in *The Holy Bible*. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011) P32.

³³ Anecdotal evidence viewed on <https://barnabasfund.org/?cat=/projects/category/convert-care> (accessed on 21.03.2017)

³⁴ www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/05/european-churches-growing-flock-muslim-refugees-converting-christianity (accessed on 21.03.2017)

³⁵ A. Race & P. Hedges, *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (London: SCM Press Ltd 1993) P19

³⁶ Surah Al-A'raaf, Verses 172-173 in the Qur'an states that all belong to Allah as they were created by him.

³⁷ Universal blessing in Genesis 12:3.

³⁸ Davison & Milbank, P87

³⁹ Davison & Milbank, P86-87

Though there are numerous descriptions of conversion and theological perspectives on salvation, Dr Tim Green advocates the necessity of conversion and approaches this in the light of Identity Theories.⁴⁰ Green refers to those who change faith groups to being ‘spiritual migrants’⁴¹ in that Muslims who choose to follow Christ subsequently adopt a new value system, a new language and unspoken rules of etiquette. Green refers to the classification of identity in society by quoting Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi; that society is made up of a Collective Identity (A group’s identity in the eyes of the World), Social Identity (Who one is in relation to other groups within a main group) and Core Identity (Who one is in the inner self).⁴² Of Muslims who become Christians, Green writes:

“...they make identity transitions on all three levels, especially as they try to reconcile two religious identities and live on the border zone between two communities.”⁴³

When a Muslim becomes a Christian in Islamic society, their collective identity is threatened as it is seen as treason. However of Western societies, Green comments:

“In individualistic societies, collective identities loosen up and become less important.”⁴⁴

What happens when a Muslim becomes a Christian in Western Society? Whilst death threats are rare, the pressure a family receives from their own people group can be intolerable. In a collective community, where concepts of honour and shame are deeply embedded, it would be difficult for the family of a convert to retain confidence or respect amongst their own community. The experience of conversion from one status to another whether it is citizenship or faith group can only be authentically articulated by the one who has experienced it. For instance, there are numerous accounts of BMBs who had a clear conversion experience after either a dream or vision of Jesus; this in turn resulted in following His teaching which in many respects is distinct from the guidelines in the Qur’an and Hadiths.⁴⁵ If there was no metanoia experience, there would be no reason to change. For the purposes of this study, conversion from Islam to Christianity comes from the realisation that Jesus is God incarnate and the manifestation of that act of love results in sole allegiance to the God of the Trinity.

Identity issues

When a conversion experience takes place, a new identity is sought such as is the case with every BMB. Green demonstrates a simplified (but authentic) illustration of the circles of identity. As demonstrated below:⁴⁶

Muslim Circle	Christian Circle
Muslim Community	Christian Community
Muslim Festivals	Christian Festivals

⁴⁰ T. Green, ‘Conversion in the light of identity theories’ in *Longing for Community*, by D. Greenlee,(Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013) p42

⁴¹ T. Green, ‘Conversion in the light of identity theories’ in *Longing for Community*, by D. Greenlee. p42

⁴² T. Green, ‘Conversion in the light of identity theories’ in *Longing for Community*, by D. Greenlee. p42

⁴³ T. Green, ‘Conversion in the light of identity theories’ in *Longing for Community*, by D. Greenlee. p42

⁴⁴ T. Green, ‘Conversion in the light of identity theories’ in *Longing for Community*, by D. Greenlee. p42

⁴⁵ <http://answering-islam.org/Testimonies/> (accessed on 21.03.2017)

⁴⁶ See appendix for additional diagram P41

Muslim terminology

Christian terminology⁴⁷

The new BMB often stands in the middle of both zones. So, she is a Muslim in the Muslim circle celebrating Muslim festivals and in the Christian circle, she is a Christian who celebrates Christian festivals. Of course, as Green stipulates this is slightly oversimplified in that there are many exceptions and overlaps to this illustration. For example, not all are forced to adopt a dual identity. However, in this generalised illustration, it is often the case that a new follower of Christ will stand at the 'border zone' of two identities. According to Green, this is not sustainable in the long term as maintaining a dual 'social identity' will eventually conflict with the core identity of a BMB as a follower of Christ. Whilst this is a valid point, the main hesitation to this from a BMB perspective is that many have little choice but to continue to travel this path and to allow their faith to develop organically which can be painstakingly slow. When at one extreme, in mainly Islamic countries, the death penalty is interpreted literally for apostates new BMBs may have little choice. Moreover, in the UK, where the same culture of honour and shame prevail in Middle-Eastern/ South Asian Communities, a new BMB again may not have any alternative but to stand at the border zone of two different communities. Though BMBs may be seen to be leading contradictory lives, it is only the new BMB that can make a decision or find some way to manage these tensions. However, if there are mentors in a Christian Community who can navigate the BMB in an informed⁴⁸ and pastoral way, then perhaps more effective answers might be found.

Green attempts to list different types of coping strategies, one of which is referred to 'Switching.' This is where a convert may speak Bengali at home, wear Bangladeshi clothes and eat Bangladeshi food. However, they may also, outside of the home, socialise with their white counter parts, speak English and eat English food. This is the case for many BMBs and throughout Hannah Shah's book these themes are a recurring feature.⁴⁹ Therefore, the discipleship of a new BMB is particularly complex and cannot be addressed through pre-packaged methods.

Discipleship

Some who have travelled the road of costly discipleship would have advocated authenticity. Bonhoeffer writes with reference to Levi in Mark 2:14:

"And what does the text inform us about the content of discipleship? ... To follow in his steps is something which is void of all content. It gives us no intelligible programme for a way of life, no goal or ideal to strive after.....At the call, Levi leaves all that he has – but not because he thinks that he might be doing something worthwhile, but simply for the sake of the call."⁵⁰

According to Bishop Graham Cray, discipleship or formation through Christ's teaching is a life-long journey *within* a community:

⁴⁷ T. Green, 'Conversion in the light of identity theories' in *Longing for Community*, by D. Greenlee. p42

⁴⁸ Fellow Christians who have spent time abroad and/or are thoroughly informed about Islamic culture where honour and shame are prevalent. It may even be better to encourage a fellow mature BMB to do this if it is acceptable to the new BMB; though it is not common for a new BMB to trust even a mature BMB initially.

⁴⁹H, Shah, *The Imams Daughter*, (London: Rider & Co, 2009)

⁵⁰ D Bonhoeffer, *The cost of Discipleship*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1959) P16

“Christian character is formed by the making of consistent choices, within a community of faith, where there is mutual encouragement to live a distinctively Christian life.”⁵¹

Moreover, formation or discipleship cannot be delivered by any one particular course or solely through cognitive learning. It has to be a lived out journey as indicated by Reverend Joseph King who was one of the interviewees.⁵²

Cost

In most cases with those who are BMBs, it may result in either permanently or temporarily separating from either close or extended family members because of the issues surrounding ‘conversion’ from Islam to Christianity.⁵³ One issue for example is in relation to the law on apostasy which is an ambiguous one but very much a live issue. Just as there are a variety of interpretations of Biblical scripture, so it is with Qur’anic scripture and of the Hadiths.⁵⁴ For example, in relation to an interfaith event held at a Catholic Parish in Lyon aimed at informing the church on how to welcome Muslim converts into Christian communities recently caused such concern that the Grand Mosque rector reported it to the local police. One Tablet reporter wrote:

“...Muslims are especially sensitive about conversion to other religions and many Islamic scholars consider apostasy a serious crime.”⁵⁵

On the other hand, Usama Hassan, a Cambridge-educated scientist and imam states that:

"...the classical law of apostasy in Islam is wrong and based on a misunderstanding of the original sources, because the Qur’an and Hadith don’t actually talk about a death penalty for apostasy."⁵⁶

However, some interpretations of Sharia law to execute apostates are adhered to in Islamic countries as in the case of Ayesha Bibi who received a death sentence in Pakistan for being a convert.⁵⁷ Though death threats are rare in the UK, the pressure to ostracise apostates can sometimes be particularly acute in some communities where the Muslim majority or Ummah may be particularly influential. It may be necessary to discontinue all contact with family, either temporarily or permanently due to the pressures of the community to revert back to Islam. Once a Muslim has converted to Christianity, family relationships cannot remain the same; experience of loss is mutual to both the BMB and their families upon renouncing Islam. It is this costliness that cannot be addressed by any pre-packaged discipleship resource.

Commitment

⁵¹ G. Cray, *Disciples and Citizens*, (UK: IVP, 2007) p104

⁵² See appendix. P42-43

⁵³ The subject and consequence of conversion can impact both the BMB and their family in a variety of ways including violence.

⁵⁴ The Hadiths are the additional instructions attached to the Qur’an.

⁵⁵ The Tablet 14th January 2017

⁵⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7355515.stm> (accessed on 21.03.2017)

⁵⁷ Ayesha Bibi sentenced for converting from Islam to Christianity in Pakistan.

http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/letter-from-ashiq-masih/?_r=2 (accessed on 21.03.2017)

The discipleship of a BMB requires a high level of commitment from both the follower and the church community. The church community becomes the replacement 'Ummah'⁵⁸ for the new follower of Christ and its members become their new 'family.' Journeying with a committed community needs to be a priority alongside a contextualised BMB discipleship approach.⁵⁹

Christian Formation

Both Walton⁶⁰ and Green⁶¹ emphasise the need for a less cognitive approach to discipleship and Reverend Joseph King who was one of the Leaders interviewed, affirms this and also suggests participating in missional activities.⁶² Walton states that small groups were the best vehicle through which discipleship could be approached. Walton expresses that small groups can take a pastoral approach to discipleship in the light of rising lone parent families. However, because he writes from a generic Western perspective, there was no mention of the pastoral approach required for those originating from a different faith group or more specifically those converting from Islam. Walton does however allude to the fact that the small group may be in a better position to cope with specific pastoral demands of certain sectors of society who may need additional support. In the interviews that were conducted, Jemima described her ministry to BMB's where a community was created with a small number of them which made discipleship feasible and enriching but also challenging.⁶³

In 'Things Hidden,' Rohr's overall theme appears to be about relating to others in order to learn more about the God of Love instead of the study of academic material.⁶⁴ Similarly Walton suggests that swimming can only be taught by practising swimming, in the same way Christian Education is best practised through what Walton refers to as the three energies of worship, community and mission.⁶⁵ In other words the commitment to Christian Education has to be facilitated through the medium of worship, community and mission. In the interviews that were conducted, Reverend Joseph King, states that there needs to be some cognitive input initially, but ultimately, discipleship flourishes through the practise of mission and being embedded in a worshiping community.⁶⁶

However, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to point out that what is referred to as a curriculum for Christian Education is dependent on scriptural interpretation, culture and tradition; what is referred to as worship, community and mission, may also be pre-packaged and of the inherited tradition which has inevitably contributed to church decline in the Global North. Of this, Drane states:

"The least that can be said is that inherited paradigms of theology seem incapable of addressing the decline that is now endemic in churches of the Global North. But there may be a bigger challenge than that: could it be that our traditional understanding of what

⁵⁸ Ummah is the imagined world-wide community of Muslims.

⁵⁹ Personal conversation: One leader from the Mahabba Network emphasised the lived out experience of Christianity as being an integral element of discipleship.

⁶⁰ R. Walton. *Disciples Together*. (London: SCM Press, 2014) P42-50.

⁶¹ T. Green 'Discipling and Training for Muslim Background Believer's' in St Francis Magazine, Nr 2 Vol.V (April 2009)

⁶² See appendix. P42-43

⁶³ See appendix. P46

⁶⁴ R. Rohr. *Things Hidden*, (London: SPCK, 2016)

⁶⁵ R. Walton. P42

⁶⁶ See appendix P42 -43

theology is has actually contributed to the alienation of large sections of the population from the life of the church?"⁶⁷

If Christian education or discipleship for the BMB takes place in such a setting as Drane illustrates, then it will inevitably affect the former. One expert on Islam who understands the implications of this is Colin Chapman. He sees the need to contextualise discipleship and his general approach is to view it through its original Middle-Eastern lens in order to better equip the BMB.⁶⁸ Throughout 'The Cross and the Crescent,' Chapman raises questions from a Middle-Eastern and Asian perspective. In other words, the questions that are raised by a BMB are going to be different to those that are raised by white British Christians. One example would be the consumption of pork and another might be the consumption of wine in Communion. How this is approached depends largely on the knowledge of the church community or the small group that the BMB is in and the tradition it represents.

The tendency of some discipleship programmes such as Alpha is that it takes a theoretical or pre-packaged approach along with the promotion of a specific Christian tradition; in this case Charismatic. As will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter, courses like Alpha have a specific curriculum which encourages specific answers according to Hunt.⁶⁹ Critical thinking is not their priority. However, according to Walton, critical thinking needs to be a part of the initial development of new followers of Christ so that they are attuned to the way that the world outside of church thinks.⁷⁰ Discipleship approaches which encourage questioning the status quo such as Reddie's curriculum are rare. In fact even courses like Green's 'Come Follow Me,' or 'Joining the Family,' lack the critical thinking element. However, the lack of critical thinking incorporated into some discipleship programmes does not negate the commitment that some leaders invest in people nor does it prevent flourishing. Indeed, Alpha is considered to be a trusted brand not only because it is a part of a national movement but also because of its publications, network of Alpha advisors, longevity and so on.⁷¹

⁶⁷ J Drane, *After McDonaldization*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2013). P127

⁶⁸ C. Chapman. *Cross and the Crescent*. (Leicester: IVP, 1999)

⁶⁹ S. Hunt. *The Alpha Enterprise*. (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004). P82, P87 & P253

⁷⁰ R. Walton, *Disciples Together*, (London: SCM Press, 2014) P51.

⁷¹ M. Booker & M Ireland, *Eavangelism – which way now?* (London: Church House Publishing 2005) P19&30.

Chapter 2ALPHA COURSEIntroduction

“In the twelve years since Questions of Life (the book of the Alpha talks) was first published, Alpha has grown from being one church’s nurture course to a worldwide movement with a high public profile. Some 7,214 churches of all denominations in the UK are registered as running Alpha, as well as 85 universities and 135 prisons..... In addition, Alpha is running in 153 countries around the world, from Albania to Zimbabwe, and is published in 55 different languages, including Burmese and four different dialects of Chinese. Overseas, 16,000 churches are using the course, 36 percent of them in the United States and 36 percent in the countries of the ‘Old’ Commonwealth – Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand.”⁷²

The Alpha course was originally created by Charles Marnham in 1977 who was then curate at Holy Trinity Brompton. It is a 13 session course on basic Christianity leading to the optional Holy Spirit weekend. Its roots are distinctively Charismatic evangelical and its ‘pre-packaged’ theology has been critiqued by various academic theologians such as, Drane, Booker and Ireland as well as a sociologist called Stephen Hunt.⁷³ Alpha covers the topics listed below, the theology of which is explained in ‘Searching Issues’ by Nicky Gumbel.⁷⁴ All this is critiqued further below.

- 1) Christianity: boring, untrue and irrelevant?
- 2) Who is Jesus?
- 3) Why did Jesus die?
- 4) How can I be sure of my faith?
- 5) Why and how should I read the Bible?
- 6) Why and how do I pray?
- 7) How does God guide us?
- 8) Who is the Holy Spirit?
- 9) What does the Holy Spirit do?
- 10) How can I be filled with the Spirit?
- 11) How can I resist evil?
- 12) Why and how should we tell others?

⁷² M. Booker & M. Ireland, *Evangelism – which way now?* (London: Church House Publishing 2005) P12

⁷³ These academics have published various literature on pre-packaged resources and are mentioned in the bibliography & footnotes.

⁷⁴ N. Gumbel, *Searching Issues*, (UK: Kingsway, 2001) P9-99

13) Does God heal today?⁷⁵

Below is how Alpha suggests that it can run each week:

6.15pm Prayer/Administration meeting for leaders and helpers

7.00pm Supper

7.40pm Welcome –notices, mention recommended reading, perhaps tell a joke.

7.50pm Worship

8.00pm Talk

8.45pm Coffee

9.00pm Small groups

9.45pm End⁷⁶

The supper element of Alpha is an integral part of it as it aids relaxation. The particularly lengthy video talks on each topic by Gumbel are also integrated into every session. This course is easy to replicate and churches which run it for more than two years are likely to see numerical growth if that is their only objective.⁷⁷ The Administrators handbook contains easy to follow information on:

Planning – 6-9 months in advance, 3-6 months in advance and so on.

Preparation – 4 weeks in advance, 2 weeks in advance, 1 week in advance

The Alpha Course – Lists the topic for each week with associated resources such as handouts.

The Alpha Celebration Supper Party – General information about scheduling.

The Alpha Weekend – 1 month in advance, 2-3 weeks in advance and so on.

The Alpha Day Away – Preparation for 1 month in advance, 2-3 weeks in advance and so on.

Daytime Alpha – General information

Lunchtime Alpha – General Information

The Alpha Copyright Statement – Explained

Appendices – Alpha resources, brochures, recommended reading and guidelines for evening entertainments on an Alpha Weekend.

Forms – Various booking forms, questionnaires, address lists and so on.⁷⁸

Alpha claims to be a tool for evangelism but the actual course content presupposes prior knowledge and it attracts those already attending church.⁷⁹ Furthermore, as discipleship begins prior to a

⁷⁵ Alpha Administrator's Handbook, P37 onwards.

⁷⁶ Alpha Administrators Handbook, P33

⁷⁷ M Booker & Ireland. *M in Evangelism – Which way now?* (London: Church House Publishing 2005) P28

⁷⁸ Alpha Administrator's Handbook, P37 onwards.

commitment to Christ, the efficacy of Alpha as a tool for evangelism is questionable. For instance, the Fresh Expressions website states:

“Discipleship is the entire process by which people become more like Christ. Often the point where 'evangelism' ends and 'discipleship' begins is blurred....So discipleship is a journey that starts before conversion or commitment. The Spirit will have been active in a person's life before they came to faith - what theologians call 'prevenient grace.' Effective discipleship listens to what the Spirit has already been doing in an individual's life and builds on it.⁸⁰

Alpha is unusual in that it assumes the same starting point for all participants irrespective of their spiritual journey or cultural background. Whilst it is quite unusual from a pioneering perspective that it has been labelled a tool for evangelism and adopts a 'come to us' approach, the Alpha course is now a global brand.⁸¹ In fact, HTB⁸² employ a sizeable number of employees to manage this brand on a global level. Even Hunt, who is one of its most vocal critics, admits that Alpha has gained significant recognition especially through secular advertising despite its pre-packaged theology. However, he and others liken Alpha to the McDonalds fast food brand in that its simplicity and lack of creativity is what gives Alpha its distinctive trademark and success.⁸³ It is essentially a pre-packaged Western discipleship tool. The term 'McDonaldization' was initially coined by George Ritzer to describe or name the process of over-rationalization.⁸⁴

It is uncertain who its target audience are especially since the Alpha course assumes some prior knowledge with a particular slant on the Charismata and has been critiqued for representing a white Western middle-class Christianity by Percy.⁸⁵ Hunt claims that the already convinced attend the Alpha course and suggests that it is for existing church members not for new enquirers.⁸⁶ Booker and Ireland do state however, that people often belong before they believe because a commitment to Christ is a journey.⁸⁷ Moreover, whether a pre-packaged resource designed by Westerners is a useful evangelism or discipleship tool for a specific cultural group is questionable. Booker and Ireland point out that it is plausible that Alpha are successful in East Africa for example, but it is not in the same category as the highly acclaimed work of Vincent Donovan and the Masai people group where theology was highly contextualised. Booker and Ireland liken the application and theology of Alpha to a form of colonization; a Western expression of Christianity which seeks to subjugate its subjects.⁸⁸

The Alpha course whilst having world-wide popularity conveys undertones of imperialist theology in that it takes a Christocentric approach imposing the universal (systematic theology) on the peculiar (context). In relation to this, Bauckham quotes Former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who stated:

“Universalism is the cultural counterpart of imperialism. Not all truth is universal...God is universal, religion is particular. We serve God, author of diversity, by respecting diversity...

⁷⁹ M. Booker, & M. Ireland, *Evangelism – which way now?* (London: Church House Publishing 2005) P16

⁸⁰ <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/discipleship/journey> (accessed on 21.03.2017)

⁸¹ M. Booker & M. Ireland, *Evangelism – which way now?* (London: Church House Publishing 2005) P12

⁸² Holy Trinity, Brompton (London)

⁸³ S. Hunt. *The Alpha Enterprise*. (UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd 2004) P153.

⁸⁴ G Ritzer quoted by J. Drane, *After McDonaldization*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2013). P1

⁸⁵ M. Percy quoted by S. Hunt, *The Alpha Enterprise*. P169.

⁸⁶ S. Hunt. *The Alpha Enterprise*. P252

⁸⁷ M. Booker, & M. Ireland, *Evangelism – which way now?* P17-P18

⁸⁸ M. Booker, & M. Ireland, *Evangelism – which way now?* P21

We will make peace in this troubled world only when we learn that God loves difference and so, at last, must we.”⁸⁹

Hunt and Drane criticise Alpha for representing a particular expression of Christianity and refer to it as the ‘McDonaldization of Evangelical Christianity’ in that it seeks uniformity in what it teaches irrespective of denomination or background. It is HTB’s brand of Christianity and its monopoly on the ‘Truth’ which must be followed by all who participate on it.

“Its intellectual level, its cultural trappings and general orientation is more likely to appeal to ‘middle-England’ – the relatively well educated and moderately affluent... it appears merely to add to the middle-class cohorts of the charismatic movement.”⁹⁰

Indeed, the ‘testimonies’ in “Telling Others,” are of white middle-class participants using the same charismatic language as Alpha.⁹¹

Hunt criticises the authors of Alpha for their over-simplistic teaching on pneumatology in which issues of social justice, peace and reconciliation are overlooked.⁹² He further expresses concern over the ‘fundamentalist’ nature of the Alpha course especially in relation to homosexuality, other faiths and pre-marital sex. These are issues which are most relevant in post-modern culture as mentioned by Hunt.⁹³ The surveys carried out in Lichfield Diocese by Booker and Ireland also revealed a concern for Alpha’s ‘obsession’ with substitutive atonement in its curriculum along with the already listed objections above.⁹⁴

A pre-packaged curriculum with its expression through the Charismatic tradition is unlikely to empower minority ethnic followers, women, the oppressed or more specifically, the BMB. The Alpha course avoids any discussion of Christianity’s colonial heritage and the dangers of Biblical interpretation. Throughout ‘Searching Issues,’⁹⁵ which accompanies the Alpha course for facilitators, Gumbel seems to caricature complex theological issues on topics such as homosexuality⁹⁶ and refers to mainly white Western theologians from his tradition such as John Stott, David Watson and Michael Green to endorse a certain expression of Christianity.⁹⁷ For example on the controversial issue of ‘suffering,’ Gumbel over-simplifies this by stating that this occurs because we live in a ‘sinful’ world but eternity should be the Christian’s priority.⁹⁸ In fact all throughout this book, he provides oversimplified answers which shall be critiqued below. In relation to the Holy Spirit weekend, some Bishops have objected to Alpha’s emphasis on speaking in tongues and Hunt and Percy refer to it as ‘indoctrination.’⁹⁹ However, it ought to be noted that this is actually an *optional* weekend and Alpha’s teaching on the Holy Spirit are not external to evangelical Christian teaching but the emphasis on personal experience over a corporate experience has caused concern.

⁸⁹ Rabbi J Sacks quoted by R. Bauckham in Bible and Mission. (UK:Patternoster, 2003), P7

⁹⁰ S. Hunt. *Anyone for Alpha?* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001) P116

⁹¹ Gumbel, N, *Telling Others*. (UK:Kingsway 1994) P33, P53, P89.

⁹² S.Hunt. *The Alpha Enterprise*. P81. (HTB have taken initiative in the area of social justice; the Besom project engages with the poor and aims to recruit others to do the same).

⁹³ S. Hunt. *The Alpha Enterprise*. P133-P144

⁹⁴ M. Booker & M Ireland, *Evangelism – which way now?* (London: Church House Publishing 2005) P24

⁹⁵ N. Gumbel, *Searching Issues* (UK: Kingsway Communications 2001)

⁹⁶ N. Gumbel, *Searching Issues*. P70-82

⁹⁷ N. Gumbel, *Searching Issues*. P20, P13 & P35

⁹⁸ N. Gumbel, *Searching Issues*. P23

⁹⁹ S. Hunt, *Anyone for Alpha?* P101

Whilst they claim to be ecumenical in that it is deemed to be accessible to Roman Catholics, Baptists, Salvation Army and so on, it has also been divisive. In fact, according to Hunt, some URC leaders resigned over the adoption of this course in their churches and it has been doctrinally insensitive for the Roman Catholic Church – a prime example being with reference to the Saints or the Holy Spirit. The Alpha course does not accommodate for doctrinal differences neither is permission given for modification. However, Gumbel states that it is precisely in the spirit of ecumenism that teaching on the sacraments for example are avoided. Some church groups have still found it necessary to modify certain elements such as the Holy Spirit weekend.

A discipleship course created by elite Western Christians will include material from their world view. For those from a Muslim background, there are a range of unique issues associated with a new follower of Christ which are not covered by a pre-packaged course on Christian discipleship such as Alpha. For example, there are issues relating to loss of family, community and income as a result of being an ‘apostate.’ However, there are organisations that address matters like these like the one that exists in the South West of the UK, where Christian hosts house and disciple BMBs.¹⁰⁰ It seems to be beyond the scope of Alpha to address BMB discipleship. Having stated this, Sally and Steven who were interviewed did actually state that they felt Alpha allowed for some modification when it came to BMB discipleship. However, whether this was done with permission was not established. Furthermore, their background is Charismatic and so therefore it is unsurprising that they would endorse the Alpha course.¹⁰¹

The Alpha course cannot be an all comprehensive guide for every new Christian of all backgrounds despite its phenomenal success in certain contexts because the content material is pre-packaged; it is distinctly Western and charismatic. Some would say it is outdated.¹⁰² Despite its numerical ‘success’ on a world-wide scale even in Asian and African countries, whether a generic course designed in the West can effectively and authentically disciple new Christians who are of Asian or Black origin is questionable. Qualitative success cannot be measured by the use of statistics neither by the acquisition of intellectual knowledge solely.¹⁰³ The theology and application of Alpha is dispensed through a consumerist Western lens, representing a type of McDonaldization, therefore its participants are deprived in their understanding and application of any contextual theology. Bevan states:

“We can certainly learn from others....but the theology of others can never be our own.”¹⁰⁴

The Alpha course falls into the category of “The Translation Model” as coined by Bevan.¹⁰⁵ It is an example of where theology is simply translated into a context without taking into account the cultural complexities of the context. When a new culture is entered into for the first time, it may be necessary to simply ‘translate’ the gospel. However, the UK is not new territory neither is its BMB population.

It is easy for academic theologians to critique Gumbel for not engaging with ‘highbrow’ theology and of course completing ordination training does not necessarily make him a professional theologian.

¹⁰⁰ See interview with Jemima Partridge in Appendix P46

¹⁰¹ See appendix for interviews. P45

¹⁰² M Booker & M Ireland, *Evangelism – which way now?* (London: Church House Publishing 2005). P18

¹⁰³ R. Walton. *Disciples Together*. (London: SCM Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁴ Bevan, S, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (USA: Orbis Books, 1992). P5

¹⁰⁵ Bevan, S, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (USA: Orbis Books, 1992). P37

However this does not prevent him from being an authentic disciple of Christ with a desire to make more Disciples of Christ. Percy, Hunt and others have launched many a scathing attack on Alpha, but to date they do not appear to have provided a suitable alternative answer either. Not many academic theologians mention the fact that Alpha provides a meal as a part of the course which is invaluable in enabling people to relax which demonstrates good hospitality. This type of hospitality would actually be the norm within Asian/Middle-Eastern contexts. The Emmaus Course on the other hand is a more theologically robust course, but it is missing the hospitality of sharing food. This element is vital. In fact most of Jesus' discourses took place during mealtimes.

Alpha is simply one example of a discipleship tool in spite of its uncomplimentary description - McDonaldization of Christianity. Perhaps, in the near future, Alpha can be revised to include a culturally specific curriculum. They have already made some progress in that there is Alpha for Prisons, Youth Alpha, Forces Alpha, Senior Alpha and so on. It is also important to mention that the leaders interviewed for this dissertation did not talk about a 'correct' theology in relation to BMB discipleship neither did they critique Alpha through an academic lens.¹⁰⁶ They did however, emphasise the importance of contextualisation as in the interview with Mark Fellows and an awareness of resources which conveyed the viewpoints of white Western Christians as mentioned by Reverend Joseph King.¹⁰⁷

One discipleship resource that does however, demonstrate contextualisation is 'Growing into Hope' which was developed by an academic called Anthony Reddie. His approach to Christian education from a liberationist perspective shall be considered next.

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix for interviews. P42-48

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix for interviews. P42-43 for J King & P47 for M.Fellows.

Chapter 3

GROWING INTO HOPE¹⁰⁸

Introduction

If Alpha represents the McDonaldization of evangelical Christianity, then “Growing into Hope” is the antithesis. Reddie, a former Queens Foundation tutor, devised material for the Christian education of multi-ethnic congregations called, “Growing into Hope” in the 1990s. His material was developed to empower black children and young adults, though it could be adapted to cater for adults too. The discipleship material which was developed in consultation with others encourages its participants to be aware of their historical, social and political context. Theology cannot be taught in a vacuum and therefore, Reddie has contextualised his material to better educate his people group. Bevan states:

“The contextualization of theology – the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context – is really a theological imperative. As we have come to understand theology today, it is a process that is part of the very nature of theology itself.”¹⁰⁹

‘Growing into Hope’ contains short play-scripts designed to be performed collectively, illustrations of black role models from the past and an appropriate scripture to inform the context from a liberationist perspective. He uses the powerful tool of the arts to not only reach his audience but to interact with them. From a teaching perspective, this material is empowering and enriching as it allows for engagement with real life issues in a creatively accessible way. Unlike the Alpha course with its copyright ban, Reddie encourages leaders to adapt and experiment with the ‘Growing into Hope’ manuals. Reddie is not concerned about modification affecting the ‘integrity’ of his material like Alpha are, but instead encourages experimentation and offers only vague guidance on the administration of it. He encourages collective learning and seeks to increase understanding of people’s backgrounds by providing an explanation of black cultural values and traditions and the effect it has on faith. All of the themes below make use of play scripts, scripture, images and so on.

Course Content Overview: Volume 1

First Session:	Advent Week 1
Second Session:	Advent Week 2
Third Session:	Advent Week 3
Fourth Session:	Advent Week 4
Fifth Session:	Christmas Day
Sixth Session:	Covenant
Seventh session:	Harvest

Resources (Worksheets containing images of black role models)

¹⁰⁸ A. Reddie, *Growing into Hope*, (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1998)

¹⁰⁹ S. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (USA: Orbis Books, 1992). P3

There is also a **Volume 2 of 'Growing into Hope'** with the same structure which covers the themes of Lent and Easter, Mothering Sunday, Passion Sunday, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost Introduction, Pentecost Sunday and Sunday after Pentecost.

The resources that Reddie has created contain images and symbols which black people can relate to.¹¹⁰ Incidentally, the resources include images of Jesus with afro hair. The Alpha course references white European male theologians and though they are credible, it does not empower minority ethnic people or females. Interestingly, Drane writes of how Gustavo Gutierrez's travels to Europe to study theology left him only relating to the stories of the Bible and nothing else. Liberation theology asks, "What does the Bible look like through the eyes of the poor?"¹¹¹ Through his materials, Reddie is asking not only about what the Bible looks like through the eyes of the poor, but also what it looks like through the eyes of his black participants, the uneducated, the female, the powerless and so on.

'Growing into Hope' is a resource which probably fits into most aspects of Bevan's 'Anthropological Model' in that the emphasis is on the preservation of cultural identity above Christian identity. Current or contextual experience informs the interpretation of scripture and tradition. In other words, Reddie devises a contextual theology for his people group. Reddie mentions that the majority of black people who were born in the UK have a different heritage and therefore:

"...expressions of faith are somewhat different from European traditions."¹¹²

Pre-packaged models of discipleship resources are often inappropriate for minority ethnic followers of Christ because resources like Alpha will inadvertently keep minority ethnic followers uninformed about their history. Therefore a more contextualised theology is the only answer or more specifically a theological imperative as stated by Bevan.¹¹³

However, whilst Bevan stipulates that contextualisation is a theological imperative, it is also important to exercise caution when discarding the wisdom of our inherited tradition. Drane for example, in spite of his caution to pre-packaged theology, reminds us that in the inherited tradition, some catechesis date back to ancient church practises and form invaluable discipleship material.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, with reference to Davison and Milbank's concern for form and content; some elements of catechesis as passed on via the inherited tradition such as teaching on the Eucharist and on the Trinity are what makes the Christian Church the Christian Church.¹¹⁵ In other words, not all elements within the inherited tradition have to carry colonial baggage. Perhaps Reddie's material would benefit from the incorporation of some of the positive elements of the inherited tradition. The wisdom and teaching of the African and Asian Church Fathers would only seek to empower black youths. Furthermore, this resource requires a certain level of time investment for the facilitator and appears to be designed for those who are in the teaching profession. However, it is still simple enough to administer. Though it has been designed for a multi-cultural audience, it can be adapted for use with other audiences. This highly contextualised resource would still benefit from a complete

¹¹⁰ For example, Marcus Garvey who created The Universal Negro Improvement & Conservation Association of African Communities to highlight the injustices that Jamaicans suffered under British rule, Sam Sharpe a Jamaican who led a slave rebellion in Jamaica, Mary McLeod a former cotton picker in the USA who started a school and then went on to advise President Franklin D. Roosevelt and many others.

¹¹¹ J Drane, *After McDonaldization*. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2013) P126

¹¹² A. Reddie, *Growing into Hope*. P5-6

¹¹³ A. Bevan, *Models of Contextual Theology*. P3

¹¹⁴ Drane, *After McDonaldization*. (Apostolic Tradition, Didache, Epistle to Diognetus etc) P88-89

¹¹⁵ Davison & Milbank P23-25.

review: it may benefit from an audio visual input like Alpha and it might also be helpful to commence each session with a clear learning objective. So, in relation to Advent week 1 for example, it is unclear at the beginning, what the learning objective is. Never-the-less Reddie's material provides a rich foundation to build on.

In the same way that Reddie has done for his participants, resources that are culturally specific to British BMBs also need to be created. Though teaching material for minority ethnics and more specifically BMBs seem to be niche markets, it is worth noting that the Christian faith which originated in the Ancient Near East has been interpreted through a Western lens thereby promoting and maintaining a certain world view. Reddie states:

“...the majority of current Christian education material available in Britain, from whatever theological or denominational background, carries within it the experiences and ‘world view’ of its writers. It also says something about those people who will most readily relate to the material. Most of the material on the market at the moment is written by, and largely for, white middle class people. These existing materials do not intend to be exclusive, but they remain so, because the way in which the Christian faith is expressed, portrayed and understood is mainly from a white, Eurocentric perspective. Although the majority of black children and young people in this country are born here, that does not mean that their experiences, cultural values and expression of Christian faith are synonymous with those of white middle class children. There is a great deal of difference...”¹¹⁶

This is specifically what Reddie tries to counteract with his culturally specific curriculum for Christian discipleship. Academics like Reddie are all too aware of Christianity's colonial heritage and his aforementioned comment can also be applied to the curriculum for BMB's . Both Newbigin and Sudworth also acknowledge this history.¹¹⁷¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ A. Reddie, *Growing into Hope*, P4

¹¹⁷ R. Sudworth, *Encountering Islam* (London: SCM Press 2017) P113

¹¹⁸ Lesslie Newbigin who was an Anglican Priest in India, also acknowledged Christianity's tumultuous past in his general praxis. (See Bibliography).

Chapter 4

COME FOLLOW ME¹¹⁹

Introduction

Dr Tim Green, an expert in cross-cultural mission and former staff from the Oxford Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies has been involved in initiating discipleship materials for BMBs for several decades.¹²⁰ Having lived in mainly Islamic countries, he has been well positioned to comment on current or imported discipleship materials into the Arabian and South Asian context. In his experience, discipleship material that was imported from the Western world and delivered by Western missionaries was lacking contextualisation. Lesslie Newbigin was of the same persuasion in his praxis.¹²¹

Course background

Green's research which culminated in "Come Follow Me," was as a result of wanting to design a programme that was contextual and faithful to the gospel from an evangelical perspective. His main concerns were to avoid a programme that was solely about acquiring intellectual knowledge, but more about holistic discipleship and to also ensure that it was accessible to both illiterate and literate. For Green, this meant that the programme could take either an oral or a literate track, but the programme would need to fulfil a number of criteria as follows:

- *Relevant to the local context. Training should relate to believers' religious, social and educational background, using local idiom, parable and stories in ways which make them feel 'this is written for us'. Teaching should be relevant to their daily lives and the issues they face.*
- *Rooted in scripture. Teaching should be faithful to the Bible, not merely using proof-texts to support topics, but equipping believers to understand scripture chronologically and to study in inductively. Content should be evangelical but without denominational bias.*
- *Rounded. It should bring all-round growth in knowledge, character and skills. At each level, measureable objectives should be specified for what students should 'know', 'be' and 'be able to do' as a result of completing the training at that level.*
- *Responsive. Students should not be bombarded with one-way information (whether written or oral) but should constantly interact with it, demonstrating their understanding applying it to their own lives. Courses should be user-friendly, interesting, and short enough to be managed by busy adults.*
- *Relational. Neither books nor electronic media can make disciples. Only disciples can make disciples, for the Christian life is more 'caught' than 'taught.' So any training course must involve interaction with a human mentor, either 1:1 or in a group.*

¹¹⁹ T. Green. *Come Follow Me*, (UK: Lulu Publishing, 2013)

¹²⁰ The Oxford Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies specialising in research in interfaith dialogue. See: <http://www.cmcsoxford.org.uk> (accessed on 21.03.17)

¹²¹ L. Newbigin. Author of several books including *Proper Confidence*, (London: SPCK, 1995)

- *Regular. While at the early stages discipling is frequently informal and irregular, more consistent growth will occur when students take part in a regular programme including scheduled meetings and practical assignments.*¹²²

Course content

This course is based on 1 Peter as the new church was subject to persecution. It was not designed to be used in the UK but according to Green it can be adapted for use in the Western world. It has been designed for those who are already BMB's. Green's conviction of the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible is the foundation of this highly contextualised course. In the appendix, he has included a glossary of Arabic terms such as Sharia (law), Dua (prayer), Hajj (pilgrimage) and so on. He also encourages facilitators to take a holistic approach to BMB discipleship by encouraging them to socialise with the participants and to be aware of pastoral needs. Green purposefully avoids the term 'Christians' because the perception of Christianity by the participants is not positive. They confuse Christianity with certain negative Western value systems linking it to sexual promiscuity, the consumption of pork and alcohol to mention but a few.

The course consists of 20 sessions which Green acknowledges is lengthy and suggests that it can be split into 2 halves or Facilitators pick the sessions they want to. There is a combination of discussion, writing, reading and film clips along with some practical elements. Participants are encouraged to memorise Bible verses which is a familiar exercise for Muslims as Arabic scripture is memorised from a young age. All of these sessions begin with and end in prayer. This is what is covered:

Lesson 1 Becoming Christ's Follower. Because this is a course for Christians, Green emphasises the need to accept Christ into the participant's life if they have not already done so. The session focuses on Simon Peter being called to Christ and the sacrifice he makes to follow Christ. The memory verse for this session is Matthew 11:28.

Lesson 2: New life in Christ. He uses the term 'Jihad' here which in Arabic means 'struggle' to make clear that a new life in Christ may well be a struggle. It is to prepare BMB's for what may become a difficult journey. The memory verse for this session is 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Lesson 3: God the Father. To refer to God as Father is considered to be a blasphemy as Muslims see it in human terms and therefore link it to sexual activity. This session aims to communicate the nearness of God through this term. It would be unthinkable in Islam as Allah does not share his divinity with anyone else. Green does not immediately mention the Trinity whilst referring to the Godhead here. The memory verse is 1 John 3:1.

Lesson 4 Obeying Christ by the Power of the Spirit. It is in this session that Green introduces the Trinity. The idea that the Trinity combats self-effort is emphasised here as it is a common belief that Muslims think they enter into Paradise through self-effort. Issues about sacrifice and what the Holy Spirit is, is covered here; BMB's sometimes confuse the Holy Spirit with Angel Gabriel. Incidentally, Green does not mention the original feminine noun 'ruach' for the Holy Spirit. The memory verse is 1 Peter 1:15.

¹²² T. Green in 'Discipling and Training for Muslim Background Believer's' in St Francis Magazine, Nr 2 Vol.V (April 2009) St Francis Magazine. P6-P7

Lesson 5: Talking with God. The Lord's prayer is memorized here but the fact that it is not just a ritual is emphasised. Islam is practised through a series of rituals; from praying five times a day, to fasting and pilgrimage.

Lesson 6: God's word for us. Green's position on the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible is very poignant here. Because of this there is no provision for critical analysis of scripture. This session focuses on Green's position that all scripture is God-breathed and therefore God speaks through the Bible. He compares this with the Angel Gabriel speaking to the Prophet which became the Qur'an. The course covers the fact that the Bible is translated into many languages which does not diminish its value. This is compared to the Qur'an which cannot be translated and has to remain in Classical Arabic.

Lesson 7: Members of Christ's Church. The global community of Christians is likened here to the Ummah. Both communities are imperfect. The word Ummah is used in the Arabic translations of 1 Peter 2:9. Pilgrimage is also referenced here. The fact that Muslims visit Ka'ba to circle a black stone as part of their pilgrimage is compared to Christ being the most precious stone. The memory verse is 1 Peter 2.

Lesson 8: Member of two communities. Identity issues are covered here. Green encourages BMB's to try to serve both communities: the one of their heritage and their new Christian one. Again, the problems that can arise from this duality are covered here. The memory verse is 1 Peter 2:17.

Lesson 9: Reasons for persecution. Green thinks that the Western church can either underplay or glamourize persecution of BMB's. The material covers strategies on how to manage this. 1 Peter 2:21.

Lesson 10: Reacting to persecution. Teaching is required for this as the people group it was designed for have been caught in a cycle of revenge and protection of honour for a long time. The context is one where honour and shame are prevalent. The memory verse is Matthew 5:44.

Lesson 11: Husbands and wives. This teaching challenges the Muslim notion that if the wife does not bear a son, the husband is permitted to take another wife. Muslim men can take up to four wives. It also emphasises that priority is given to wives over mothers because in this culture, the married couple will often start their married lives with their husband's mother. The memory verse is Genesis 2:24.

Lesson 12: Solving our disputes. The honour of a community in Green's context is important. What one person does affects a whole community for Muslims. Compare this to a Western culture based on individualism. The memory verse is 1 Peter 3:11.

Lesson 13: Giving witness. When a baby is born to Muslim parents, the 'shahada'¹²³ is whispered into its ear. This means to give 'witness' and this concept is then considered from a Christian perspective to give witness to Christ.¹²⁴ The memory verse is 1 Peter 3:18.

¹²³ The Arabic word Shahada means to give witness that there is only one Allah.

¹²⁴ J. Ralston, *Bearing witness: Reframing Christian-Muslim encounter...in* Theology Today, No.1 Vol.74 (April 2017) also writes of the Christian call to witness (John 1:6-8, Matthew 28 & Acts1) which is paralleled with the same demand in the Qur'an (Surat al-A'raf, 7:172) for the children of Adam to bear witness.

Lesson 14: Baptism. This contains some valuable insight into how to conduct BMB Baptisms sensitively. Green issues useful guidelines on photographing, social media, who to invite to the occasion and the like. The memory verse is Matthew 28:19.

Lesson 15: The straight path. This section is on God's law. Sometimes it is confusing for a BMB to leave a religion full of rules and regulations (Islamic sharia) to enter into a faith that seems to be not so (Christian Sharia). The memory verse is 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

Lesson 16: The law of love. That the motivation for obedience is love is covered here. It is not through fear of punishment that Christians are called to obey unlike in Islam. The memory verse is Mark 12:30.

Lesson 17: Fasting and giving. Because Islam is a prescriptive faith, Muslims are told exactly what to give as 'zakat'¹²⁵ and for how many days to fast. The freedom in Christianity to give with the right motivation and to fast whenever desired is explored here. The memory verse is Mark 12:30-31.

Lesson 18: Fate and magic. Green stipulates the need to cover this session with particular prayer as many BMB's will come from a tradition steeped in fate and magic. Some types of Islam, especially Folk Islam, rely on wearing charms, visiting a phir¹²⁶ and so on. Some Muslims feel that Allah is so far from them that they turn to other aids such as visiting a phir.

Lesson 19: Serving one another. The concept of humility and feet washing are covered here. Just like in Jesus' time, washing feet is thought to be a humiliating task in Asian culture. The memory verse is 1 Peter 4:10.

Lesson 20: Our pilgrimage to heaven. The pilgrimage to Mecca is compared with the Christian pilgrimage to Heaven where we will enjoy being in the presence of God. The memory verse is 1 Peter 5:10.

The discipleship book addresses what BMB's are most likely to encounter in their context using helpful Arabic terms. Unlike Alpha, but more like Reddie's 'Growing into Hope,' there are examples of life application exercises which are culturally specific or contextual. For example, one of the subjects which are covered, which is seen to be taboo in the Western world is domestic violence. Another area that is taboo in the Islamic world but widely discussed in the Western world are the issues relating to alcohol consumption. Furthermore, relating to one's family is an important area that is also covered. There is also an emphasis on story telling as this is one of the tools used in education in the Asian, Middle-Eastern world. This discipleship programme is a creative and practical attempt (just like Reddie's material) to disciple BMBs who are indigenous Asians, who may or may not be literate. Unlike Alpha, Green's bespoke material takes into account the background of the new Christians. Drane praises those who take into account the background of the new follower and those who are unafraid to commence original work such as Green.¹²⁷

Though Green's work is original, it is clear however, that faithfulness to scripture is more of a priority than a theology from a liberationist perspective. This is what can be framed as Bevan's Countercultural Model in that scripture is adhered to but also interpreted through a certain cultural

¹²⁵ Charity tax

¹²⁶ Muslim Shamen

¹²⁷ J. Drane, *After McDonaldization*. P134

lens.¹²⁸ There are still elements of the Translation Model but the difference is that it is mainly delivered through contextualisation. It can be argued that inherited theology lives on but is made more appropriate due to Green's ability to contextualise. It is also clear that Green takes a distinctly evangelical position. This is evident not only in his reliance on scripture but also because he encourages new Christians to share their new identity with their family members. For Green, being authentic about one's faith is more important than personal safety as he suggests that being inauthentic stunts the growth of a disciple which may be plausible. Gibson also states that 'witnessing' is a gospel imperative.¹²⁹ However, sharing one's faith as a BMB is much more complex in Islamic countries especially when apostasy can lead to the death penalty in certain contexts.¹³⁰ To his credit however, he suggests in the User guide, that the student would need guidance in this area.

At first glance, the "Come follow me," material seems like an "English as a Foreign Language" exercise book designed for indigenous Arabs or indigenous South Asians or even for those who are newly arrived to Britain. Indeed, it was written for a small community in an Islamic country who would have been either illiterate or elementary level educated.¹³¹ It is highly contextual, in that it makes references to specific cultural complexities with regards to marriage, children and business deals. If this study book is evaluated through a Western lens, it may appear to be unusual but the author is familiar with his cultural context hence the type of topics that are covered and communicated. This study book is a result of several years of research on discipleship and training for BMBs in the form of a programme design that was culturally relevant. Whilst one Iranian leader that was interviewed mentioned that she found it useful as a basic introduction to Christianity, it would not necessarily have a wide appeal to British BMBs. However, with new migration trends, this material may actually still be effective in Britain.

Whilst some BMBs may relate to some of the practical matters that are mentioned, there are additional complexities to be dealt with. Amidst the backdrop of post-modernity, British Asians have created a type of hybrid culture which at times may be difficult to categorise. For example, though divorce is frowned upon within South Asian communities, Asian females are now initiating divorce proceedings. This on the whole would be unthinkable in South Asian countries as the female counterpart would not have the means to support herself. In the UK, most South Asian youths live between two worlds; the world of their parent's generation which will have identifiable Asian roots and the world that they live in which is distinctly Western. Distinctly Western may mean that they listen to a certain type of music which is informed by modern Western culture. They may even dress like their Western counterparts which may not seem so modest in the eyes of their parents.¹³² In order to address the lack of contextual discipleship approaches for BMB's in the British context, Green has recently collaborated with a BMB called Roxy to create a culturally relevant resource called 'Joining the Family' which is aimed at equipping leaders in the British church.

¹²⁸ S. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*. P117

¹²⁹ E. L. Gibson, *Missional Discipleship*, in *Int'l Review of Mission*, No.105.2 (403) (November 2016). P160-162

¹³⁰ Majority Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh uphold the death penalty.

¹³¹ This country cannot be named for security reasons

¹³² See Green's Identity diagram in appendix of this dissertation. P41

Chapter 5

JOINING THE FAMILY¹³³

Of the above, Steve Bell, National Director of Interserve England and Wales states:

“If ‘Joining the Family’ didn’t exist, it would need creating – “pronto”, this is a sure sign it will meet a real need.”¹³⁴

This resource is aimed at equipping the British Church in the discipleship and pastoral care of BMBs raised in the UK. Because of Green’s understanding of Islamic culture and his collaboration with a BMB named Roxy, the material has been differentiated to bring about a more contextualised and effective approach. His willingness to learn from his BMB friends is a testament to the lengths he will go to provide appropriate training materials. He also welcomes critique and encourages adaptation. This is unlike the Alpha Course. Most discipleship approaches seek to equip the new follower of Christ, but JTF is aimed at equipping the teachers. This ground-breaking work has taken several years of consultation and research which is evident in the outcome. The package includes the following:

- 1) Joining The Family – A book on how to welcome BMB’s into the British Church¹³⁵
- 2) Joining the Family – Facilitator’s Guide¹³⁶
- 3) Joining the Family – Participants’ Workbook¹³⁷
- 4) A memory stick with security instructions – with PDF’s and video clips¹³⁸

Course outline.

In the Participants’ Workbook, Green states the following course aims:

- Compassionately understand issues that believers of Muslim background face.
- Be equipped to ‘be family’ for these believers, caring for them and helping them grow in Christ.
- Learn from them and be enriched by their insights, ministry gifts and cultures.
- Develop or deepen lasting friendships which provide a place of safety and trust.¹³⁹

The Participants’ Workbook focusses on equipping the British Church to disciple BMBs themselves with emphasis on pastoral care. Whilst the above course outline is admirable, some are essentially qualities that describe those who nurture BMB’s rather than being learning objectives. For example, ‘to understand’ is a tangible learning objective but ‘to compassionately understand’ is a different matter. Compassion is a gift.

The course covers the following as illustrated in the Participant’ Workbook:

¹³³ T. Green, & Roxy, *Joining the Family*, (multi-media) (Milton Keynes: Kitab, 2016)

¹³⁴ Green. *Joining the Family*, Facilitators Guide. P1

¹³⁵ Green & Roxy, *Joining the Family*.

¹³⁶ Green, *Joining the Family*

¹³⁷ Green, *Joining the Family*

¹³⁸ The video contains interviews with BMB’s and British Church leaders

¹³⁹ Green, *Joining the Family*. P2

Session 1. Journeys to Jesus – Acts 9:3-20. The road to Damascus is covered here describing St Paul's encounter with the risen Lord. This is because BMB's often have the same dramatic encounter. This session begins with 3 'aims.' The correct teaching term is 'learning objective' and the following may need revising: 'Be excited by God's power in drawing Muslim people to himself.'¹⁴⁰ This is an expression that can certainly be hoped for rather than it being a learning objective.

Session 2. The pearl of great price – Mark 10:28-30. This emphasises the loss that many BMB's face when they make the commitment to follow Christ. The 3 learning objectives are clearer here. For example, one of them is, 'Start to understand why there is this cost.' This is crucial to the equipping of the British Church and its role in the pastoral care of BMB's.

Session 3. Welcome to the Family – Matthew 12:46-50. When a BMB chooses to follow Christ, they forfeit their own families. This is when the church becomes their replacement family. Again this session is crucial learning for the British Church with regards to pastoral care. However, the comments made by Reverend King are also a warning of the dangers of such expectation of the church.¹⁴¹

Session 4. Being transformed – 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, 17-20. This is in relation to growing close to a new BMB for the purposes of discipleship. It lists some attitudes that are common in the Islamic world view which are counteracted with a new worldview through Christ. One such attitude is "Men are superior to women."¹⁴²

Session 5. A blessing to our churches – Acts 11:20-26. Just as the early followers of Christ enriched the 1st century church, so will BMB's. Some expressions of the Western church perceive difference to be a threat and so this seeks to encourage leaders to think about how enriching it is to have BMB's in the congregation. Just like in session 1, the following is mentioned, 'Be excited by the ways that believers of BMB can enrich churches in the West.' Again to be excited is not a tangible learning objective but an expression that without doubt ought to be prayed for.

Session 6. Ambassadors for Jesus – Mark 3:20-21, 31-33 and Romans 9:1-4. This is a simple approach to the complex area of identity. It seeks to inform leaders on the complexity of managing relationships within the birth community and how the BMB can communicate their new faith which may or may not be impossible. Never-the-less this requires the guidance of an informed leader.¹⁴³ Because of the sensitivity and complexity surrounding such transition, it is important to note that not all are equipped to do this section. It may actually be a journey that requires mutual exploration. Another example of a non-tangible learning objective is 'Feel something of the pain BMB's often feel about their Muslim families.' Compassion is a gift that can be prayed for rather than learnt.

In relation to content, Green's work in the past and present, (this time with Roxy), relies heavily on the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible. Elements of Bevans Translation Model probably apply here in that Green and Roxy rely so heavily on Scripture.¹⁴⁴ However Green clearly states that JTF is written from an evangelical perspective although he hopes it will still be accessible to other

¹⁴⁰ Aim 2 in session 1 of *Joining the Family Participants' Workbook*. P3

¹⁴¹ See Appendix. P42-43

¹⁴² Green, *Joining the Family Participants' Workbook*, P11

¹⁴³ Green, *Joining the Family Participants' Workbook* P18-20

¹⁴⁴ S. Bevans. *Models of Contextual Theology*. P42

denominations. Despite their reliance on scripture, there is a clear attempt to contextualise this course. Basically the general experience of BMBs is viewed through the above scriptures.

A course designed in the West such as Alpha, will not cover the above elements which are fundamental to BMB's. Green's approach here is committed to scripture but it is also contextualised. It probably overlaps with ideas from Bevan's Countercultural Model in that its basis is scripture and it is usable in Western contexts. The disadvantage is that unlike Alpha which has been running for over 2 decades, JTF is a new approach and so there is no numerical or qualitative data available yet. However, despite the current lack of data on impact, it comes highly recommended by many specialists in the area.¹⁴⁵ One Iranian leader who was interviewed mentioned how appropriate the JTF material was.¹⁴⁶

In the Facilitator's Guide, Green provides a thorough explanation of how to run the course which includes a guide on Asian etiquette. This is not pre-packaged Christianity like Alpha; there are similarities in the structure but not the content. Green and Roxy explain that it is helpful to invite a BMB (and not a Muslim) to be present when delivering this course as mutual learning will emerge. Just the fact that they have to state this is an indication of where many are in the British Church in their understanding of BMB politics. They furthermore suggest that inviting a female BMB to an all-male group may not be appropriate. Whilst initially it is wise to follow this etiquette, it may be worth noting that in the British Asian Christian context, sometimes cultural etiquette in relation to gender separation is relaxed, nevertheless, it is wise to follow the author's recommendation initially. The Facilitator's Guide is constructed of 6 sessions, each of which is like an in-depth lesson plan which includes video clips, discussion, worksheets and reflective writing. The 6 sessions have already been listed on page 29 under 'Participants Handbook.'

'Joining the Family' is exceptionally innovative. Its focus is on informing mainly non-BMB British leaders who have an interest in BMB discipleship and want to develop a more holistic approach. Unlike Alpha, but much like Growing into Hope, it seeks to deliver a more contextualised curriculum, with significant input from BMBs. Because Green and Roxy's work has meant significant personal investment and sacrifice, it is with slight hesitation, that the author has attempted to critique it. However, as Green suggests in his resources, he welcomes comments on the materials and it is in this spirit the author has attempted this. When the time arrives for this material to be reviewed and edited, it might be helpful to consider the following:

- Theology – It would be empowering to include the already carefully chosen scriptures to include feminist interpretations or other liberationist perspectives. This is because most BMBs come from patriarchal cultures and Christ states her description of patriarchy as:

"The system I am defining as patriarchy is a system of domination enforced through violence and the threat of violence. It is a system developed and controlled by powerful men, in which women, children, other men, and nature itself are dominated. Let me say at the outset that I do not believe that it is in the "nature" of "men" to dominate through violence. Patriarchy is a system that originated in history, which means that it is neither eternal nor inevitable..."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ T. Green, JTF – Facilitators Guide lists endorsements by many in the same field such as Bishop Toby Howarth of Bradford, Steve Bell of Interserve and Sam Yeghnazar founder of Elam Ministries. P1-3.

¹⁴⁶ See Appendix P48

¹⁴⁷ C.P. Christ, 'A New Definition of Patriarchy...' in *Feminist Theology*, vol.24(3) May 2016. P214 onwards.

This has implications on mind-sets and though Jesus practised his ministry within a similar context, according to some theologians, He had a high view of feminist and womanist theology.¹⁴⁸

- Resources – the amount of material that is included is of a high standard and it shows lengthy research. It can in the first instance seem overwhelming to the facilitator and so it is clearly aimed at those who have a specific calling to disciple BMBs, but what of those who may not have that calling but want to deliver basic teaching? In the appendix, there is an opportunity to reduce the sessions to 3 from 6 which is not encouraged by the authors but never-the-less, they make a dispensation. It might be helpful next time to release an additional resource which perhaps covers all 6 sessions with less depth for those leaders who are time poor.
- The resources are presented by leaders who are mainly indigenous white male experts, most of whom have had the privilege of journeying with BMBs along with a small number of female experts. The consultation process however, involved a significant number of BMBs. Perhaps when it is time to revise this material, it would be helpful to have more BMB presenters. Never-the-less, Green and Roxy have made an impressive start in the way they have included significant input from BMBs overall. The authors must be commended for their ability to balance a multi-ethnic input in general.

This material is a well-researched gift to the British church. The permission to adapt the programme slightly with the proviso that the learning objective is kept, is a positive step. In the book itself, “Joining the Family,” Green and Roxy provide a comprehensive guide to discipling BMBs in the UK. The software which accompanies the pack is the visual equivalent of the book which includes interviews with BMBs and church leaders. It is a comprehensive guide to BMB discipleship and the pastoral implications of a Muslim following Christ. This is the most innovative and most comprehensive material to date; not only is it co-authored by a BMB, but it seeks to encourage different ways of learning through its use of multi-media with its emphasis on learning from BMBs. The points to note here are that the resources come with quite complicated security instructions as they contain interviews with BMB’s who need to remain anonymous, it is heavily reliant on the inerrancy of the Bible and it is uncertain whether those wanting to disciple BMB’s are encouraged to learn about Asian/Middle-Eastern hospitality concerning food. One thing that Alpha does particularly well is the meal which is a part of the course but JTF does not appear to incorporate this type of hospitality into the course. Ultimately, this resource is a distinctly evangelical, Bible based discipleship product which would probably benefit a specific expression of God’s church although it is not Greens intention to be exclusive. As mentioned before, it is probably the theology of JTF that may appear to be slightly pre-packaged in terms of language, soteriology, patriarchal language and so on. It is however still an impressive starting point for the British church and a good foundation to build on.

¹⁴⁸ Dr Janet Tollington of Westminster College, Cambridge, Dorothy C. Blass, Dr Mike Thompson of Ridley Hall, Cambridge endorse this view through their teaching and writing.

Chapter 6

Pastoral Provision in the discipleship of BMB's

Whilst in the West there is an increasing emphasis on individualism, Islamic culture and faith on the other hand are distinctly corporate identities. The way an individual conducts his/himself within a Muslim family is a reflection of that family because they 'belong' to that family or that tribe. (Note the genealogy lists in the Bible).¹⁴⁹ BMBs are from honour based cultures whereby the reputation of the family is jeopardised if an individual follows Christ. It is for these reasons that isolation for new BMBs is inevitable in the British church.

Because of the corporate nature of Islam, time alone is an uncommon activity. During the two Eid's,¹⁵⁰ the whole community will come together to celebrate; it is a time of social activity including feasting; a time of joy. A BMB can be left bereft when they are no longer able to do this if they have been completely disowned by their families and to be alone during this time can be painful. When there are family weddings which are enormous community events stretching over several days, much like the examples in Biblical traditions, for the BMB to not be a part of these celebrations can be difficult. Funerals are similar in that the whole community will come together to mourn the loss of a member.

For a BMB to follow Christ is a complex journey; it is one of utter sacrifice as is highlighted in 'Joining the Family,' which is something that pre-packaged discipleship resources do not address. Sudworth quotes a British South Asian Christian leader who states that people from other faiths leave so much behind – family, friends and culture, only to receive a Sunday service in return.¹⁵¹ When a new BMB joins a British church, numerous pastoral complexities can arise because some British churches are embedded in a distinctly individualistic culture. Consequently, the holistic discipleship of a BMB may be overwhelming to the average British church leader and congregation. For this reason, it is vital that the British church is appropriately equipped as the growth of the BMB population is now becoming significant. A BMB may need a mentor, or a confidante, or simply a meal with their new 'family.'

Guidance on the role of the church is equally important for a new BMB as they may well have to adjust or limit their expectations of the Western church as mentioned by Revered King.¹⁵² Though Reverend King's church are far from accomplished providers of care for BMBs, some members have demonstrated care through simple acts of providing furniture, food, clothing and Sunday lunches amongst many other acts. They also have the expertise of many returning missionaries who have a sharper insight into the cultures of BMBs, many of whom have become the equivalent of surrogate fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters to BMBs.¹⁵³

The Early Church, though characterised by its pastoral complications¹⁵⁴ also demonstrated a love that was shared amongst its followers through the common ownership of resources.¹⁵⁵ Indeed it is

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 1:1-17

¹⁵⁰ Eid Al-Fitre is celebrated at the end of Ramadan to remember the defeat of Satan and Eid Al-Adha is celebrated to remember Abraham's sacrifice.

¹⁵¹ R. Sudworth, *Distinctly Welcoming*, (UK: Scripture Union 2007). P124

¹⁵² See appendix for interviews. P42-43

¹⁵³ The author is familiar with the congregation of St Thomas' in Birmingham where Rev'd King is Vicar.

¹⁵⁴ Acts 6:1-4 recorded an illustration of discrimination between the Hellenists and Jews for example. Acts 15:7b-11 recorded issues surrounding circumcision.

challenging to incorporate these standards as the church is now in a new context; a context shaped by materialism and individualism. Though following Christ ought to be counter cultural irrespective of where a Christian resides, the working out of this may be in the now and not yet.

Having a mentor is also helpful in the discipleship of BMBs; someone who understands the background culture or who is at the very least sympathetic to the BMB situation is helpful. An understanding of the journey of the BMB is absolutely crucial because whilst in some circles, particularly charismatic expressions, it may be quite common to encourage the BMB to announce their new found faith to their family members, it may not be wise to do so. One leader from an Asian fellowship who had concerns for BMBs, took on the task of advising BMBs to disclose their new identity cautiously and only if absolutely necessary.¹⁵⁶ However, this advice is in contrast to Green's who in 'Come Follow Me' suggested that it was important for a BMB to announce their new faith to their families at some point. This is because he thought that by not doing so, it would compromise their integrity and stunt their growth. There are indeed discipleship and pastoral complexities involved in both of these approaches. The implications of an announcement to the family may be severe. Because the reactions to a BMB announcing their new faith can vary, it may be wise to counsel each BMB individually as to what approach is the best for them. However, making a blanket ban is not necessarily the ideal answer either and so in general it would be wise to err on the side of caution. It is helpful to facilitate a decision rather than impose an idea about what a leader thinks a BMB should do in relation to announcing their new-found faith to their family.

Discipleship, in particular for a BMB cannot be limited to studying the bible or doing further study but praxis and pastoral care must be integrated into it. For example what does it mean when a BMB cannot do the walk of witness during Easter in a mainly Muslim area? Should they practise their legal rights as British citizens to express their faith in this way or should they refrain until a time they are more confident in their faith? Pastoral care would mean engaging in these discussions and enabling the BMB to make an informed decision on how public they can be about their faith. Pastoral care in the form of reciprocal exploration is integral to the spiritual growth of a BMB. Pastoral care does not have to be limited to those who have expertise in Islam, but those who have a willingness to learn about Islamic culture and the consequences of a Muslim following Christ.

¹⁵⁵ Acts 4:32-33 demonstrated corporate ownership for example.

¹⁵⁶ This leader was a member of a mainly British Asian Church.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

With the influx of Muslims following Christ, British Churches have been challenged to examine themselves in the way they disciple and care for BMBs because discipleship and pastoral care cannot be divorced from evangelism. Some have embraced this challenge by contextualising their approach, empowering BMBs to lead groups and investing in culturally relevant discipleship resources. However, there are still deeper underlying complexities that need to be addressed by the British church.

In relation to the subject matter researched, it seems appropriate that:

- Church leaders in the British church receive relevant training if they are involved in the discipleship of BMBs;¹⁵⁷
- With regards to BMB discipleship material, new resources are developed in collaboration with BMBs for a more authentic learning pathway;
- Leaders adopt a considered approach when selecting a discipleship resource taking into account the importance of contextualisation;
- Cross-cultural conferences and consultation processes in relation to BMB's involve significant BMB input;
- The British church and in particular the Church of England, re-assesses its role in relation to BMBs through collaboration with experts in the subject area.
- The Church of England's training institutions include the study of Islam as a core module.

Church leaders

It is important for relevant Church leaders to adopt a balanced understanding of Islam and for training institutions to equip their candidates for ministry not least because of the influx of Muslims choosing to follow Christ.¹⁵⁸ Just as there are many denominations within the Christian church so it is within Islam; it is not just limited to Sunni and Shia for there are further factions.¹⁵⁹ It is therefore, not as monochrome as perhaps some examples of Western media would portray. As Mark Fellows indicates in his interview, there are significant factions within Islam and he encourages leaders to take a contextualised approach.¹⁶⁰ BMB discipleship is a peculiar task and it is not everyone's calling. However, as Rawlings enthusiastically points out in *Joining the Family*, the task is 'utterly' rewarding and the British church will be richer for it.¹⁶¹ Islam has Semitic roots and for this reason there is a rich tradition to draw upon in BMB discipleship. Some examples include how weddings are celebrated, how funerals are conducted, how hospitality is practised and the role of women. Ultimately, a BMB has the ability to bring to life the heritage of the Christian faith if they are permitted to do so by leaders in the British church.

Training courses like Alpha for leaders do not currently address issues surrounding BMB discipleship. For this reason, British church leaders would benefit from seeking advice on the matter of discipleship and pastoral care from another BMB or a leader who has expertise in the area.

¹⁵⁷ Green's 'JTF' is a significant contribution to this as it has been developed in collaboration with BMB's

¹⁵⁸ Ordination training colleges such as Ridley Hall in Cambridge have relegated Islam to being an elective

¹⁵⁹ Sunni authority comes from the Ummah and Shia authority comes from the Caliphate.

¹⁶⁰ See Appendix. P47

¹⁶¹ T. Green. *Joining the Family*.P159

Contextualisation

Just as in the British education system, provision is made for a gifted pupil or a pupil who is EAL¹⁶² through differentiation, so the discipleship and pastoral provision for a BMB would benefit from a similar approach. It may be ineffective to use pre-packaged discipleship tools which are generically Western and lacking contextualisation such as Alpha for example despite its alleged success. It is also important for Church leaders to recognise that some approaches have Christendom or imperialist overtones as Reddie mentions in his discipleship material.¹⁶³ With regards to relating to Muslims, Sudworth also states that one of the 'distasteful' consequences of Christendom is the notion that the Western view of the world is superior.¹⁶⁴ As they attempt to disciple those whose heritage is from colonised countries, there is a moral duty to convey a teaching that attempts to liberate the BMB. Also, from Green's perspective, a theology that liberates the BMB from value systems influenced by Islamic interpretation is the ideal. For example, patriarchal domination is accepted to be the norm in many Islamic societies without question. (It can be argued the same exists in some British churches too such as certain expressions of the Church of England). BMBs risk emerging with a particular expression of theology due to being exposed to pre-packaged discipleship approaches and delivered by Christian leaders who are not necessarily BMB sympathetic such as is the case with the Alpha course.

Discipleship Resources

Fresh insight is emerging in the area of BMB discipleship, but very few resources have been produced in consultation with BMBs apart from JTF. Producing discipleship and pastoral care materials in consultation with BMBs is the most effective approach as demonstrated with the JTF material. Unless an author has experienced being a member of the Ummah and subsequent dislocation, the resource is unlikely to be truly authentic. However, there are a small number of Christian experts on Islam who have a deep understanding such as Chapman, the late Cragg, Green, Howarth and Rawlings.¹⁶⁵ It is interesting to note however, there is currently no BMB equivalent of these names. Discipleship materials being produced prior to JTF relied heavily on the perspective of non-BMB males; unless this is tempered with significant contributions from BMB and non-BMB females, it risks unintentionally reproducing patriarchal theology. The literature produced has the ability to transform mind-sets for those BMBs who hail from male dominated cultures and therefore it is important that literature written from female perspectives is encouraged. It is worth noting that the JTF material has incorporated some female perspectives.

Cross-cultural Conferences and consultation processes on Islam

In the experience of a number of BMBs who wish to remain anonymous, consultation processes on public documents and conferences regarding cross-cultural mission have not invited BMB input. Conferences and consultation processes organised by groups who have a vested interest in the area of cross-cultural mission and BMB education have featured solely non-BMB male contribution repeatedly. The whole area of Christian education on subjects relating to BMBs would benefit from being supported by a committee consisting of mainly BMB's.

¹⁶² English as an Additional Language

¹⁶³ See pages 20-22 in this dissertation.

¹⁶⁴ R. Sudworth, *Distinctly Welcoming*. P150

¹⁶⁵ These experts have lived in Muslim-majority contexts & have published various materials in relation to BMB discipleship interfaith. (See Bibliography)

Role of the British Church

It may be necessary for BMBs to be supported in same-culture churches especially as the British church in particular; the Church of England at present is unable to manage effective assimilation. Green and Roxy's recommendation however is a helpful one; they suggest that the British church might offer Sunday services to the BMB with a mid-week same culture worship service. (This is the case in St. Thomas' where Reverend Joseph King is vicar).¹⁶⁶ This gives BMBs the chance to be a part of a wider community and is perhaps even more concrete than attending same-culture churches exclusively.¹⁶⁷ The idea of the same-culture church and mixed culture church seems to be a way forward but this must not be done to negate the responsibility of the British English-speaking church to nurture BMBs albeit with support from experts. Discipleship and pastoral care of BMBs cannot be the sole responsibility of same-culture churches in the long term because the family of God ought not to be divided over cultural differences but united in the love of Christ.

The whole family of God, irrespective of cultural heritage, have the ability to disciple and pastor BMBs. In the long-term same-culture churches are not necessarily the most comprehensive answer to an increasing BMB population as it may be in danger of being ghettoised. However, British Church history indicates the lack of welcome for those who are different, like for example with the Jamaican Anglicans who assumed they would find a welcome in the Church of England when they first arrived on British shores.¹⁶⁸ They were forced to create their own worshipping communities and much of their experience has been repeated for the BMBs in this generation. There is however a concern over the discipleship and teaching methods employed in same-culture churches along with the lack of critical thinking.¹⁶⁹ The same applies in BMB majority churches. It seems that leaders need more appropriate training in the development of discipleship resources and in the delivery of discipleship approaches. Just like Green, if other experts collaborated with BMB leaders to create relevant discipleship material, God's Church in Britain would be a richer expression because discipleship and pastoral care would address BMB-specific complexities.

Whilst BMB discipleship and pastoral care seem to be niche markets, it is an opportunity for the British church to respond appropriately to the Great Commission but not necessarily with a pre-packaged resource. The danger of Alpha despite its success and Gumbel's admirable authenticity is that it tries to provide simple answers to complex issues through its pre-packaged theology. One size does not fit all. Reddie however, demonstrates the richness of diversity through a more contextualised theology to empower his people group. Green's 'Come Follow Me' course was designed for a specific South Asian, Muslim majority country which is highly contextualised but it does not specifically address the complexities that British BMBs face in their context. Furthermore, Green's reliance on the inerrancy and infallibility of Biblical scripture indicates that a particular lens has been used to interpret scripture. It lacks the element of critical thinking which is important in the British education system unlike in some Asian countries where rote learning is the key method. In spite of overlaps, 'Come Follow Me' is to a large extent culturally and politically alien to the British scene. For example, the issues of taking multiple wives, apostasy and violence against women are not so much an issue as they are in some Muslim majority countries. That is not to suggest that these

¹⁶⁶ See Appendix P42-43. The mid-week Asian Fellowship is not mentioned in the interview but does exist.

¹⁶⁷ R. Oksnevad, *An investigation into the components of disharmony in Iranian Muslim Background Churches in the diaspora*. PhD Dissertation (Trinity International University, Illinois: 2013).

¹⁶⁸ Empire Windrush, June 22nd 1948

¹⁶⁹ R. Beckford. *Documentary as Exorcism*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) P3-5

matters do not appear in small insular communities in the UK however. Green's 'Joining the Family,' however, is by far the most commendable resource available currently.¹⁷⁰ It utilises different learning methods sufficiently. For example, a memory stick is used for video clips; there are worksheets and discussion elements as well as reading prior to arriving. However, there is still important work to be done in the area of critical thinking. Finally, the resources critiqued here lacked direction on the importance of silence in Discipleship as mentioned by Esther Tehrani.¹⁷¹ Perhaps this is an indication of the fact that most of the resources produced are by authors whose tradition does not overtly encourage contemplation.

The critique of the four discipleship resources in this dissertation hopefully demonstrates that there is still much room for improvement in the creation of BMB discipleship resources. A resource that adopts a more contextualised approach, employs critical thinking and supersedes different Christian traditions does not seem to exist in the UK at the moment. Though JTF lacks the latter two elements, it is to date, the most effective resource produced for the discipleship of BMB's in the British church especially as it has been produced in collaboration with BMB's.

¹⁷⁰ See endorsements in Green, JTF, Facilitators Guide. P1-3

¹⁷¹ See Appendix for Interviews. P48

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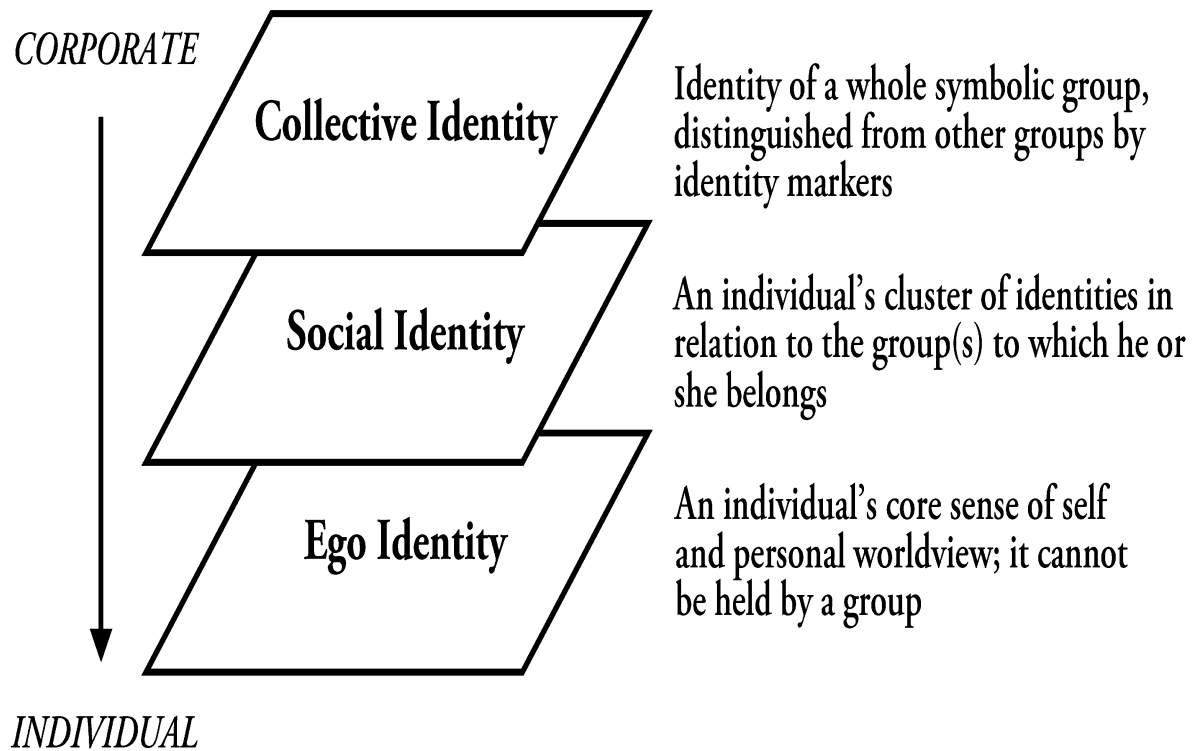
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- NB. ALL DISCIPLESHIP MATERIALS CRITIQUED IN THIS DISSERTATION ARE AVAILABLE AT QUEENS FOUNDATION LIBRARY WITH THE EXCEPTION OF 'COME FOLLOW ME' WHICH CAN BE VIEWED ON www.joiningthefamily.org**

Appendix

Greens diagram on identity.



Interviews

Interview with Reverend Joseph King – Vicar of St Thomas' - Birmingham

1) What is your understanding of discipleship?

Not easy to define. The key parts are to do with following. It's the idea of us being like pilgrims on a journey. It is about learning by doing. Jesus rapidly sent disciples out to do ministry and return to a quiet place. They returned to do a sort of debrief. Discipleship is like watching the master and then having a go and returning. Sharing experiences of ministry is a part of it. Discipleship looks like Apprenticeship, I know it's a modern word. It cannot be limited to classroom learning. Following and doing are the 2 key aspects of discipleship. 95% of discipleship is about doing. Learning is different in this society but there is a commonality.

2) What materials if any, do you use for the purposes of discipleship?

I think I'm keen to emphasise following Jesus and so Christianity Explored though it is from a conservative evangelical perspective is for this reason used as it is very focussed on Jesus. It concentrates on one gospel: MARK. I know evangelism comes before discipleship. But people need to know who they are following. However, after this, I'm not too keen on further materials. Whilst I respect LICC and Rob Bell for example, I think it's more about giving an opportunity to serve and share with others. Rather than a DVD, I'd prefer to find a mother and toddler group or school assembly where experiences are shared. For some people learning in a cerebral way is valuable, but these are more the exceptions. I hope that this approach would make it more accessible.

3) Can you explain how useful you have found this material?

Christianity Explored was good in that it kept things quite contained within one gospel rather than bouncing back and forth from scriptures. Especially, if you're trying to encourage people to look at Christ and follow him. It's best to keep things simple at first. Helpful. Traditional way of reading Mark 8 for example is a fulcrum point. Jesus gives them the information they need to enable them to make a decision. Jesus was more concerned about his Disciples rather than the crowd. It's helpful for me as a leader to keep in my head what the courses trying to do.

4) Would you like to add or takeaway anything from it?

I would like to add that they needed to add more black and Asian faces in the DVD. Sitting in a multi-cultural context it seemed a bit cringy. The other issue was the exclusivity of Christ – how is that helpful, edifying and a blessing? For example, many have come from a Sikh background some of whom have idols in the house. What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord? Does everything else have to go? For someone like me, it's an easy question to answer, but not for Sikhs for example. If you take away the idols, you take away their belonging. There isn't much discussion on how to communicate the exclusivity of Jesus in a multi-cultural context. Jesus wants exclusive loyalty. It cannot be shared. The Sikh background believers and one Hindu are happy to see Jesus as a source of strength, power

and healing, but they don't seem overly ready to abandon everything for Jesus. We had one Muslim following. She had already abandoned all else. When she came to us she had already been through a process of several years of detangling herself from the Islamic community. It was easier for her to appreciate the Christianity Explored course. She understands that most Christians are white British. She isn't surprised to find a discipleship course with DVD's portraying white faces. But she knows this isn't entirely representative. She used to belong to an Asian Christian fellowship.

5) If you were devising your own discipleship programme, what would you include in it?

I would want to do some sort of sandwich course. Perhaps 2 or 3 sessions on who is Jesus, his power to forgive, to heal, to restore, cleanse etc. Then to send people out. To do something with what they have learnt. It would have to be well planned to put into practise what they have learned. What does ministry look like in their context? What happens when healings do not take place? What does Discipleship mean in that context? They need to have a go at being sent out in the form of service eg go to Seedlings (a nursery in multi-cultural setting) for 2 weeks or go to a youth group that has the most unchurched young people, to a local school to help with an activity. Door knocking may be possible but that would need to be carefully planned. To meet with those who were undecided or those who do not follow Jesus Christ – what does that look like? Until the theory hits reality, discipleship is never fully informed. It would always stay in the library instead of the real world. They need to realise that things aren't as simple as the church makes them out to be.

6) Would you like to add anything else to inform me?

I would want to include in the learning "What does it mean to belong to the Church?" Where does it fit into discipleship? Belonging to Jesus's people is quite challenging. Churches are places where people can sometimes be greatly hurt and sometimes greatly blessed. Some teaching or someway of addressing the role of the church in the life of a believer particularly for those who come from another faith would be useful. If a white middle class person comes to church they will come with one set of expectations. If an Asian eg Sikh or Muslim comes, their questions are going to be different. The white middle class will think "Where does this fit in my schedule?" But the Asian person will think the church is the answer to all their problems. The Church is very strong on boundary, professionalism; time keeping....this is not relevant to Asian people because they're thinking here is a community of people who will look after me. The tragedy is church does want to do this, but this is done within a time constraint. It is an unhappy marriage.

Interview with Ayesha Chowdhury Leader of an Asian discipleship group - Birmingham

1) What is your understanding of discipleship?

Being able to engage with the Bible and growing with Christ. Having a closer relationship with Christ. Encouraging brothers and sisters to read the Bible and pray.

2) What materials if any, do you use for the purposes of discipleship?

I go online and read commentaries. I try to then put it into more simpler words and with a better understanding. With new Asian believers, we translate it to simple English and then to their home language eg Hindi or Punjabi or Urdu if necessary. I use a variety of commentaries.

3) Can you explain how useful you have found this material?

Very useful because me without theology or bible knowledge it is helpful. I am able to teach the Bible study in a simple format. We use another format...it's a booklet. We've done the book of Mark and now we're looking at the 10 commandments which is going to take us all the way to April 2017! We've got a strategy and we know what we're doing.

4) Would you like to add or takeaway anything from it?

I do add to it from what I know. We adapt it to suit the Asian believers. We kind of contextualise it. We kind of customise it to our needs.

5) If you were devising your own discipleship programme, what would you include in it?

I would simplify the Gospel of Mark. I would teach it in a way on how to be more like Jesus. We can all say we're Christians but the righteousness of Christ is hard. We do not follow him fully yet. Imitating Jesus is difficult. I would like to face challenges. We need to share and be real. Which means being sensitive. We need to encourage each other to grow in Christ. We need to explore ways we can show that we're Christians.

Interview with Steve and Sally Jones – Home group leaders and experienced cross-cultural missionaries. Cambridge

1) What is your understanding of discipleship?

I think it's to bring people to what an initial decision meant. So erm, once a decision to change direction in life then there needs to be some sort of erm, discussion with them what the practical implications mean. In some instances this has meant tracking a path towards baptism but there are many other issues concerning attitudes, responses and day to day practical living. In the example of one person we have in mind, erm, there was a personal decision followed by erm, a request for help and then a desire to be a part of a regular discussion group around Christian values. This led to not only baptism but erm a Christian marriage and then a very marked spiritual growth whereby this person became involved in reaching out to others with a Christian message towards commitment to intercession and seeking to contribute to church meetings with prophetic input.

2) What materials if any, do you use for the purposes of discipleship?

The Bible primarily. Church notes that we've learnt from Sermons. We improvise. I'm trying to think of a book.... We did have a group of Iranian enquirers...about 4 or 5, where we had a discussion booklet called "Who is Isa al-Masih?" by John Martin. I think it's one of the best books for focussing on Jesus in the Qur'an and focussing on what is also said in the Bible about him. It's a booklet – 6 chapters – it's a small book available via Amazon. It's by Authentic. We have it in mind to use "Come Follow me" by Tim Green and Steve Bell. But at the moment we don't yet have the right people to do that with.

3) Can you explain how useful you have found this material?

The church notes are particularly helpful because they're contextual and it helps them to relate to other Christians and learn from them. We had a student from an Arab background doing the Alpha course, which he finished, including coming to the Holy Spirit weekend. There seemed to be some Godly intervention. Erm, but not ultimately resulting in anything particularly visible. It was extremely hard to say whether he came to faith. He needed a more contextual course which is why the new "Aleph" course is more appropriate, but to be honest we haven't yet seen it. Alpha is remarkably broad and has translated well to many cultures. It can be contextualised well.

4) Would you like to add or takeaway anything from it?

I think the Alpha course is well presented but there are issues that need adjusting for the BMB with regards to particular life issues such as attitude to money, truthfulness, marriage possibly, erm...

5) If you were devising your own discipleship programme, what would you include in it?

The Aleph course starts with the OT prophets, Abraham in particular a common prophet – the most significant common prophet you could say and this seems to be a better starting point than Alpha does in its Western context.

INTERVIEW with Jemima Partridge, Leader of a BMB specialist organisation in Bristol

1) What is your understanding of discipleship?

Ok, well like that's the most massive question! For me erm, well really I'm just aware that I don't think discipleship happens just after conversion. But actually, I would see discipleship starting at the seeker level. So if people are enquiring that is the start to discipleship. So there's that. I don't think its course based, but life modelling. I think it's a lifelong process. I don't think there's an end. So those are the 3 main things I would say.

2) What materials if any, do you use for the purposes of discipleship?

This is in the context of BMB's? Yes. So, I think 'Come follow me' is really good. I would use Al-Massira which is a DVD course. It's not originally meant for discipleship but really meant for seekers but it's really good. I think erm actually; I just use the Bible, different sections. Perhaps looking at Psalms and getting them to apply it in their life. Looking at the Lord's Prayer. And the Sermon on the Mount. Really looking at Jesus' life and words.

3) Can you explain how useful you have found this material?

Obviously CFM helps people to engage as there is an expectation that people will write things down. It's sort of like a work book situation which helps people to apply it to their lives. The names of people are contextualised and real life scenarios which really apply to their cultures. It's obviously useful for better application personally. The Bible stuff I tend to do one-to-one and that's also very good for application. I found that people initially don't realise the words from scripture apply to us. They say they're beautiful words, how lovely etc. but it takes a bit of erm explanation from me to help them to see that these words apply to us today.

4) Would you like to add or takeaway anything from it?

I haven't used CFM enough times to do that. As people grow, you look at the sermons from last Sunday and so on, take time, is there anything they didn't understand etc.

5) If you were devising your own discipleship programme, what would you include in it?

This is about resources isn't it? What I'm interested in is the lived experience. So, sharing your life together, that might be in our situation, where a Christian hosts one or 2 BMB's and as they eat and live and talk together erm...they learn from that experience. As things come up you talk about it and you explain it. You can clear up misunderstanding and then you can pray about it together. We have 5 houses that host BMB's. Sometimes there are linguistic and cultural misunderstandings which can be cleared up quite quickly if you're living with someone. That cuts resentment. People may be out of work and they may be disappointed about job interviews, you can pray for them and emphasis God will provide for them.

Interview with Mark Fellows, International leader and theological trainer, Cambridge (This was completed via email due to the leader's time constraints)

Definition of a disciple:

A disciple is a person who increasingly worships Jesus in all of life, is being changed by Jesus and obeys Jesus in all of life.

3 simple statements:

(a) Conformed to the image of Christ

☒☒ Growing in personal holiness & a strong passion for God's glory

(b) Mature and multiply

☒☒ Growing in obedience to Christ's teaching & helping others to follow him

(c) Effective witness to God's kingdom

☒☒ Growing in influence & affecting their spheres of activity in the home, workplace and society (salt & light)

As a family of churches we have used a number of different methods to disciple people. It very much depends on the disciples Muslim Background. As I am sure you are aware there are multiple versions of Islam around the world (5 main blocs), and much will also depend on the religious freedom within a particular country. So, even within the same nation one might take a different approach. In an underground setting where new believers are willing to "risk" meeting up, you might disciple them face to face, while with others you might encourage them to tune into Christian media and use modern technologies as a source of growing in their walk and obedience to God.

We have found discipleship with MBBs is best done in small groups whenever possible. Learning together and allowing them to make relevant cultural application appears to bring greater transformation to people's lives and helps build stronger community.

Most of our churches and church planters would centre discipleship upon the reading, study and contextual application of the Scriptures. Some would use chronological Bible story-telling as both a way to present the gospel and for on-going discipleship. Many of our guys have used various written materials and audio-visual type approaches from time to time. I have a personal bias towards SAT-7 satellite TV as my teenage friend is the founder and current CEO! One of the things I appreciate about their approach is that the programme makers are national believers and also that there is a breadth of material covering the whole of life.

MBBs face enormous life style/community challenges and discipleship must address these areas and allow for good cultural contextualisation that arises from them, rather than application being instituted top down from a discipler.

One final thought. As with many new believers it is easy to gravitate to those of a similar cultural background. However, there is both a oneness and diversity within the body of Christ, and therefore like any others, MBBs must be disciplined into embracing the full breadth of God's worldwide people

Interview with Esther Tehrani an Iranian leader of a discipleship group in Oxford

1) What is your understanding of discipleship?

For me discipleship is a complete turnaway and then go to a new way. For a start it's about trusting a person. Walking in the dark and follow the light, that is what discipleship is for me. I had to trust the way that specific light showed me and I had to put my complete trust in this light. Daily prayer is important for me. The more I listen to God, the more it helps me to walk. I have one in the morning and one in the evening where I review the day. I ask God to show me where I can improve. I did the Come follow me course which I translated into Farsi because it was so good. At the moment I teach a group in Bristol. I found it good as you know that finding Jesus is a big step for a Muslim. The Trinity is a big challenge for Muslims and the way Green explained this, it didn't cause a problem. The course is about what we need every day. It's step by step process. I think it's a very good course which has been adapted for our culture. For example the lesson started with 'Forgiveness' that it is not earned. These things are very good for us ex-Muslims. I used to worry about my salvation but Greens material really helped me.

2) What materials if any, do you use for the purposes of discipleship?

I use Come follow Me in Farsi. I am hoping we can finish this and then do the other course called Joining The Family. Come Follow Me helps them to understand the basics of Christianity which is very important and then they are ready to integrate with the British society and the British church. They can study JTF with other congregations. The whole church family can do JTF together, it is good for integration into the British church.

Because I studied at Wycliffe Hall, I use Michael Lloyds book called Café Theology and C S Lewis's "About Christianity" and I'm a big fan of N T Wright.

3) Can you explain how useful you have found this material?

They are very useful, because for me they are simple and rich. Theology is not easy, it is very complicated. They say things in an easy way. I definitely recommend Green's material because he is used to working with Muslims.

4) Would you like to add or takeaway anything from it?

Well because of my interest, I'm Iranian, I would like to see an Iranian influence in Come Flow Me. For instance all the pictures relate to the Afghan people and so I would like to see pictures that can apply to all. We need more people like Tim Green because he understands us. He treats us like normal Christians but he is aware of our needs.

5) If you were devising your own discipleship programme, what would you include in it?

I would add one more thing...it's about having quite time with God. Because we normally learn to ask God for things, but listening to God is more important. We need to know what He wants to tell us. I would add a section on 'Listening to God.'

Summary.

The overall purpose of the interviews was to evaluate the emphasis a leader put on contextualisation. The results indicate quite a high level of comprehension with regards to the practical element of BMB discipleship alongside a need to contextualise. The author was unsurprised to find that there was little awareness of discipleship education modelled from a liberationist perspective. Whilst this lack of awareness did not affect pastoral provision, it did however, influence the ways theological perspectives were shaped for the BMB.

Every leader interviewed, recognised and acknowledged the importance of bespoke discipleship materials or approaches. This further demonstrates the need to develop more group-specific resources for the purposes of discipleship. Non of the leaders were content to use material developed in the west by Western leaders as they failed to recognise that BMB's had particular needs. Furthermore the material developed in the west proved to be a cultural barrier to understanding Christian discipleship. This further demonstrated the author's concern that a Gospel originating in the Ancient Near East was difficult for a BMB to understand despite its Middle-Eastern origins because it was taught through a Western lens representing pre-packaged ideas.