

But Can We Trust Mustafa?

by Nabeel T. Jabbour



There are some Christians who believe that Islam is too evil and therefore it is impossible for any Muslim who puts his/her faith in Christ to stay among his/her own people as salt and light. Let me present a fictional situation to demonstrate this attitude of prejudice that does exist among some Christians. I will play the role (of a composite of an Egyptian) young man with this kind of attitude of prejudice against Muslims.

Every Thursday evening, I go to our Protestant church in downtown Cairo to attend the meeting for working men and women. Because I was discriminated against during my university days, I have a certain prejudice against Muslims. In our Egyptian newspapers, we often read articles written by Muslims attacking Christianity and the Bible. Furthermore, a Muslim equivalent of a TV evangelist keeps insulting our religion.

On a certain Thursday, I go to our weekly meeting at church. My friends tell me that we have a guest speaker tonight, a Muslim who has become a Christian. My response to the news is a mixture of pleasure and suspicion.

Is he a genuine Christian, or is he playing a role in order to deceive us? When he enters the church, he automatically repulses me as I notice that he has a bruise on his forehead, a hypocritical manifestation of his fake spirituality. Fanatical Muslims with a zibeeba (a bruise on the forehead) attempt to communicate the message that they have prayed so many times, kneeling and touching the carpet with their foreheads, that they got that bruise. Another thing that repulses me is the way he greets me. He says, "Asalamu 'alaykum" (peace to you). Only Muslims use that terminology when they greet one another. Perhaps he is not a true Christian. Something that repulses me even more is his name. How could he

come to our church with the Muslim name Mustafa? Mustafa means "the chosen one" and is one of the names of their prophet Muhammad because they believe that he was chosen by God. I wonder what kind of meeting we will be having tonight.

After the singing and the prayers, this man is introduced as a former Muslim who has become a Christian. I sit there wondering whether my friends who invited him were duped and trusted him prematurely. I need him to convince me that he has become a "real and true Christian," just like me, and I am not an easy person to convince.

When he starts sharing his story, I, like most of those in the church meeting, quietly listen to him to find out whether he is genuine. As he warms up and starts attacking Islam and ridiculing Muhammad and the Muslim faith, I start enjoying his story. From our laughter at his jokes about Islam and our agreeing with him about his attacks, he finds out how to win our approval. By the time he finishes, we are all elated and encouraged by his sharing, although we wish he were more polished like us and used our Christian terminology. But we know we need to be patient because this polish will come with time and practice. After the meeting, I, along with others, thank him for his sharing and congratulate him on his conversion. As people come and thank him, he feels as though he has finally found his place of belongingness in our church meeting because he is being treated like a hero with a halo around his head.

I still do not like the zibeeba, the bruise on his forehead. I hope that in the future he will put cream on it in order to cover it up. During the informal time at the end of the meeting, I follow him with the corner of my eye and notice at one point that he is talking to my younger sister and to other women. When I see him doing that, I begin to wonder about his motives. Is he coming after the women? Why would a Muslim want to believe in Christ other than for women, money, or a desire to go to America? So back at home, I warn my sister and advise her not

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to get too excited just yet that he has become a true believer. We will need to wait and see “fruit” before we trust him. I even quote to her the litmus test: “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:20).

When Mustafa returns the following Thursday to our church meeting, not as the speaker but as an ordinary person, he finds that most of us respond to him with plastic, artificial smiles. We keep him away at a safe distance because he still greets us by saying “Asalamu ‘alaykum,” and he still “smells” like a Muslim. It seems I was not the only one from our group who preached to a family member a little sermon about the need to avoid Mustafa until we see fruit! So Mustafa starts wondering whether he has come to the right church. Very soon he meets another Protestant Christian in Cairo, who invites him to his church. The halo returns temporarily but does not last long. Then he gets invited to another church and to another, and in the meantime he learns how to please the Christians: by making fun of Islam and by attacking Muhammad and the Qur’an.

As the months pass, he begins to get more polished in his terminology. At the same time, he ruptures every relationship he had with his Muslim family and friends as he becomes openly critical of Islam. He even changes his name from Mustafa to Peter and gets baptized. Shortly afterward, he comes to our Thursday meeting again, this time to give a testimony of how he is suffering for Christ. He is not Mustafa anymore, but brother Peter. I never felt at ease by calling him “brother Mustafa.” Brother and Mustafa did not mesh. He no longer uses the Muslim terminology he used to, and he lifts up his arms in church during the singing and shouts, “Hallelujah” and “Praise the Lord.” Now he has really become one of us; he is inside our “fortress with thick walls” that protects us from the Muslims outside. f

This composite sadly describes how we Arab Christians, who tend to be very churchy in our culture, have treated Muslim-background believers over the centuries. Does the Bible teach that a Muslim, upon believing in Christ, should rupture his relationships with his Muslim family and friends and get integrated into Christianity? Is it possible for a Muslim background believer in Christ to remain among his own people? A few chapters in my book deal with these questions.

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