Conversion between Islam and Christianity
in a Danish Context

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1. INTRODUCTION

When I left Denmark in 1981 to become a missionary in the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, Islam was about to be implanted in Denmark. Since 1967 migrant workers mainly from Turkey and Pakistan were invited to Denmark to work in our factories. They stayed on as immigrants and brought their families to Denmark thereby forming a new nucleus of a Muslim community in Denmark. Their number was still fairly small, and their presence was felt mainly in Copenhagen and other larger towns.

While I was away from Denmark, I observed (and was a participant in) the encounter between Islam and Christianity in Northern Nigeria. Whereas Christianity was brought to Northern Nigeria about 100 years ago, Islam had been implanted there for more than 600 years and was the predominant religion. Since Islam as well as Christianity are missionary religions, both Muslim and Christian groups endeavoured to spread their message, and as a result of the encounter between Muslims and Christians in daily life settings and in missionary settings some Muslims converted to Christianity and some Christians converted to Islam. In most places the encounter between Muslims and Christians was peaceful, but in the 80s increased tensions were felt, in connection with the Islamic revolution in Iran, and violent episodes took place among various Muslim groups and between Muslims and Christians.

Back in Denmark in 1991, the situation had changed dramatically. Now Islam was high on the agenda in the political life and in the conversations between ordinary people. During the 80s the number of Muslims in Denmark had increased significantly due to the influx of refugees from Muslim countries. While I observed (and took part in) the encounter between Muslims and Christians in Denmark, I reflected on the encounter between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria and in 2000 completed a PhD on one aspect of this encounter, namely the conversion of Muslim Fulanis to Christianity (Mogensen 1999 & 2000). This study made me curious about the encounter between Muslims and Christians in Denmark and the conversions that were reported to take place.

So far nobody has carried out a study about conversion between Islam and Christianity in Denmark, and this paper does not pretend to present such a study. This paper, however, is part of my preparation to undertake such a study. Through an exploratory study of certain aspects of the Danish encounter between Muslims and Christians in general and conversions between Islam and Christians in particular I hope later to be able to formulate a proper research project.

After a survey of the literature on the topic in Denmark in particular in the West in general, I will give a brief description of the present Danish context for this encounter, and outline how Christians face Muslims and Muslims face Christians. In the main part of the paper I will analyse a limited number of conversion accounts to identify some of the dynamics of the conversion process. Finally I will conclude with some perspectives for my future research.

2. SURVEY OF LITERATURE

Islam in Denmark has been the topic of several research projects and books. From 1982 to 1990 Statens Humanistiske Forskningsråd published a series of 9 research reports on “Islam i Nutiden”,

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most well known of which is “Islam I Danmark. Muslimske institutioner I Danmark 1970-89” by Jørgen Bæk Simonsen. Other important studies on Islam in Denmark include J. Nielsen (1995) and Simonsen (2001). Muslims in Denmark have also published books about their religion and culture and their situation in Denmark, seen from various perspectives (e.g., Khader 1996 Echammari 1998). A variety of Christians have published their perspective on the encounter between Islam and Christianity in Denmark (e.g. Skovsgaard 1994 and 1999; Arendt 2001; H. Nielsen 2000; Rasmussen 1997 and 2001).

The literature concerning conversion between Islam and Christianity in Denmark, however, is extremely scarce. So far no scientific study has been carried out in Denmark. What we have is only a number of interviews with converts or their own accounts in newspapers and magazines. Until Danish studies are carried out, we may draw on research from other Western countries.

Larry Poston, in his study “Islamic Da’wah in the West. Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam” from 1992, set out “to determine the nature of conversion to Islam within Western contexts with respect to the sociological characteristics of the converts (i.e., age, gender, religious background, etc.) and the motivational factors involved in their decisions to become Muslims” (Poston 1992:160), which is fairly similar to the type of research I hope to carry out. Originally, he hoped to base his analysis on questionnaire interviews with North American converts to Islam. Twenty Muslim organisations were contacted, and anonymity was promised to the interviewees, but most of the organisations were not ready to cooperate or did not respond. The disappointing result was that only 12 questionnaires were completed and returned. Poston concludes that

The poor response was probably due to the suspicion that exists among American Muslims regarding research into their lifestyles and religious experiences. There is a lack of confidence in the ability of non-Muslims to properly understand and portray those who adhere to the Islamic faith (Poston 1992:161).

Poston, therefore, based his analysis on 60 written conversion testimonies from a variety of sources. Only a little less than half of the sample were Americans, the rest Europeans mostly from Great Britain. This of course limits the value of the research.

In Great Britain Ali Köse was much more successful in obtaining the cooperation with Muslim authorities and organisations, the reason probably being that he was a convert to Islam himself. In 1996 he published his very thorough study of “Conversion to Islam. A Study of Native British Converts”. His research is based on analysis of questionnaire interviews with 70 converts to Islam. Although the sample, which was established through a snowball and convenience sampling methods, cannot claim to be representative of all conversions to Islam, his research gives an extremely valuable insight into the conversion process. There will probably also be some significant similarities between conversion to Islam in Great Britain and in Denmark, but the Muslim community has a much longer history than the few decades in Denmark. Also the political, cultural

1 This book contains both Christian and Muslim perspectives on the encounter.
and religious milieu in Great Britain differs significantly from Denmark so that we should be careful in our comparisons.²

Based on the studies by Poston (1992), Köse (1996) and Gerholm & Litham (1988), Colin Chapman in his book from 1998 “Islam and the West: Conflict, Coexistence or Conversion?” points to the following factors that, in various combinations, have influenced the conversion process:

1. Dissatisfaction with a previous religion or ideology
2. Disillusionment with Western society
3. Conversion through marriage
4. Personal contact with Muslims
5. The Qur’an
6. Islam as complete philosophy of life
7. The simplicity and rationality of Islam
8. Moral and ethical standards in Islam
9. Disgust with racism outside Islam and the universal brother- and sisterhood inside Islam
10. Special appeal to women: the respect shown to women by Islam
11. Sufism, e.g. the spirituality and the spiritual power that Sufism offers
12. Balance between the communal (human bonds) and the individual (direct access to God) aspects of Islam

In other Nordic and Western countries research on conversions has been carried out or is being conducted right now. Lena Larsen has a thesis, which unfortunately is not yet published, about conversion to Islam in Norway, “Velkommen til en stor familie” Islam og kovenison i norsk kontekst”, and Anne Marie Roald is about to publish her research about conversion to Islam in Sweden. These research reports will be very valuable for research into conversion in Denmark because the cultural, political and religious context and the history of the Islamic presence in these countries is fairly similar to what obtains in Denmark, although there are also significant differences, among others the ethnic composition of the Muslims communities in the Nordic countries.

So far, all the literature mentioned here, refers to studies of conversion to Islam. There are hardly any studies about conversion from Islam to Christianity in the West! The only exception is Jean-Marie Gaudeul’s book from 1999 “Appelés par le Christ ils viennent de l’Islam”.³ Gaudeul has collected the written conversion accounts of 175 Muslims who have converted to Christianity. For the purposes of this paper, however, the problem is all the converts converted in Africa and Asia except 9, who lived in France. For the purposes of my research, it is important to heed Gaudeul’s warnings.

Il ya donc d’abord une exigence de discretion. Un certain nombre de ces convertis sont en danger. Beaucoup de musulmans ne tolèren pas qu’un membre de leur


³ There are also collections of accounts of conversions to Christianity, such as Mark Hanna’s collection from 1975, “The True Path. Seven Muslims Make Their Greatest Discovery”, but they contain no academic analysis of the accounts.
communauté change d’affiliation religieuse, même si les liens familiaux et social sont préservés. Les cas d’assassinat ou d’attentat ne sont pas rares (Gaudeul 1999:30).

Gaudeul only quotes from testimonies that the converts themselves have published or testimonies from people who have passed away

3. THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN DENMARK

After a brief description of the Danish scene for the encounter between Muslims and Christians, the encounter will be analysed from the perspective first of the Christians and then of the Muslims.

**The Danish Context for the Encounter**

The Danish experience with the encounter between Christians and Muslims is very short. In the 50s and most of the 60s the number of Muslims in Denmark was so insignificant that most people had never seen a Muslim, much less talked with a Muslim in Denmark. The presence of the Muslims in Denmark today is a result of two factors.

The presence of Muslims in Denmark is primarily due to an economically determined immigration of work migrants about 30 years ago. The economic boom in the 60s led to a shortage of workers. Since the other West European countries experienced a similar boom and also were in need of workers, and Eastern Europe, minus Yugoslavia, were closed by the iron curtain, the labour immigrants came to Denmark primarily from areas fairly far away such as the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Pakistan and Morocco. The last three countries being Muslim countries, most of the so-called guest workers who arrived from 1967 onwards were Muslim men. When an immigration stop was introduced in 1973, 15000 people had come to Denmark. Since the Muslims were guest workers they were expected to return to their Islamic home countries when their work was no longer needed. These Muslim guest workers, however, stayed on and brought their families to Denmark.

The presence of Muslims in Denmark is secondly due to the influx of asylum seekers over the last 20 years. From the 80s onwards the number of people fleeing from wars, oppression and natural disasters came to Denmark as asylum seekers. Many of these asylum seekers came from Muslim countries such as Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Bosnia, Somalia and most recently Afghanistan. When these people were recognised as refugees they could, according to the international conventions bring their relatives to Denmark too (Simonsen 1990:5-19; Matthiessen 2000:104-105).

The guest workers and the asylum seekers have now lived in Denmark with their families for so many years that a significant number of the Muslims in Denmark today are born here. As Jørgen Bæk Simonsen already pointed out in 1990 in his report, “Islam I Danmark. Muslimske institutioner I Danmark 1970-1989” (Islam in Denmark. Muslim Institutions in Denmark 1970-1989), the Muslims have already developed a network of institutions that support their Islamic (and often also their ethnic) identity as a minority group in the Danish Christian majority society. Apart from the Ahmadiyya mosque in Hvidovre, no traditional mosques have so far been built in Denmark, but Muslims gather for Friday prayers in about 70 mosques in schools, apartments and in simple
mosques in all the bigger towns. Often organised along ethnic lines, a number of institutions have been established such as primary schools, Qur’an schools, cultural centres, burial organisations etc. (Simonsen 1990: passim).

In Denmark the religious affiliation of people is not registered by the government, the only exception being the members of the Folk Church, that is, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. Based on analysis of the country of origin of the immigrants it has been estimated that the number of people who consider themselves to be Muslims in Denmark today is about 170,000, i.e. more than 3% of the population. Unless the size of the immigration changes significantly it has been estimated that by the year 2020 the number of Muslims in Denmark may be around 300,000, i.e., 6% of the population (Matthiessen 2000:108). As a result of the integration law from 2000 the refugees granted asylum have been distributed among all local governments so that today the encounter between Muslims and Christians is no longer limited to the bigger towns but is a reality also in most villages.

In the late 60s and the 70s the encounter between the ethnic Danes and the immigrants was fairly peaceful. When it was realised that the work migrants were not returning to their home countries, and the number of asylum seekers rose significantly in the 80s, the attitude of many ethnic Danes slowly turned more sceptic and negative, and political parties began to advocate much harsher policies towards immigrants. In the 90s heated debates occurred in the press, in the parliament and among people in the workplaces. Among the issues debated were the wearing of veils by Muslim women at work, plans for building of mosques in Copenhagen and Aarhus, cemeteries for Muslims. The tragic events on September 11, 2001, added fuel to the fire and the election campaign up to the general elections on November 20, 2001, came to focus on immigration policies and the fear of Islam.

Polls taken in various countries in Europe seem to indicate that the attitude of Danes have been more negative towards immigrants in general and Muslims in particular than in many other European countries. It has been suggested that this might be connected to the fact that Denmark has been one of the most homogenous countries in Europe, both in terms of ethnicity and religion. We have had waves of immigration before 1967, but their impact has hardly been felt by ordinary people. The immigrants coming to Denmark within the previous 100 years came were fairly few, many returned to their country of origin again, and all of them came from the Christian European cultural circle. The recent immigration, however, has been quantitatively and qualitatively quite different. The immigrants and their descendants are counted in the hundred thousands, and most of them come from ethnic groups whose culture and religion are considered to be very foreign to most Danes.

Denmark is fast becoming a multi-ethnic ethnic society, and due to the nature of the new ethnic groups in Denmark, our society is also turning multi-cultural and multi-religious. Due to the lack of experience with other ethnic groups, cultures and religions the tensions have been rising, in particular between some ethnic Danes and Muslims.
Christians face Muslims

Denmark has been under Christian influence for more than 1200 years, and Christianity has been the official religion for more than 1000 years. Today The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark is – according to the constitution – the Danish Folk Church and is as such supported by the state. About 87% of the population are members of this church. Only since 1849 has there been freedom of religion in Denmark, allowing for other churches to be established in Denmark. The membership in all the so-called Free Churches, such as the Catholic Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church and the Apostolic Church, is probably less than 2% of the population. Even many of the 11% that are neither members of the Folk Church nor the Free Church probably consider themselves Christians in some sense of the word today. The presence of a very visible Islamic religion and the growing tensions around Islam in the world and in Denmark, has probably had the effect that more people today than 20 years ago will identify themselves as Christians or at least point to the Christian cultural inheritance which also is of great importance to them.

The Christians in Denmark may be grouped in a variety of ways, but for the purposes of this research, apart from the distinction between Folk Church and Free Churches, the distinctions made by Hans Ravn Iversen seem to be most relevant her. Iversen distinguishes between three typses of Christianity: culture Christianity (kulturkristendom), church Christianity (kirkekristendom) and charismatic Christianity (karismatisk kristendom). Culture Christianity is the religion of the majority of the Christians in Denmark who live with a great distance to the church and its practice, but who still are influenced by Christian values. (Iversen 1999:20). Church Christianity is the religion of those Christians not only share the Christian values of the culture Christians, but also accept the faith in Jesus as Son of God and saviour of mankind, accept the Bible and our Confessions as an expression of Christianity and who participate in the services and the work of the church (Iversen 1999:25). Charismatic Christianity is the religion of those Christians whose hears are burning for the Gospel and who therefore become the activists of the church (Iversen 1999:28-29).

It is my hypothesis, which will require more research to substantiate, that the way Christians face Muslims is among other factors determined by which of these types of Christianity they represent. Ralf Pittelkow (2002), Søren Krarup (2000 & 2001) and Steen Skovsgaard (1994), who all have participated in the debate about Islam in Denmark, can be seen as coming out of the culture, church and charismatic Christianity traditions, respectively. This does not mean that others from the culture Christianity tradition will agree with how Ralf Pittelkow face Muslims and Islam in Denmark and the world, but there will often be similarities in the way they argue. Whereas Pittelkow will typically take his starting point in the human rights and the history of enlightenment in the West (2002), Krarup will take his starting point in the Danish people as a Christian people and the history of the church and the Christian people in Denmark, and Skovsgaard will take his starting point in an understanding of the missional obligations of the church and the experience of the worldwide mission. In this way they will reach quite different conclusions concerning the way to face Islam and Muslims in Denmark.

In the political realm we can distinguish between attitudes towards Muslims (and other non-Western immigrant and refugee groups) that reflect goals of either isolation/deportation of the
Muslims, integration of the Muslims or assimilation of the Muslims. According to the first goal Islam a presence in Denmark should be discontinued. The leader of one of a rightist party has consistently called for a “Muhammedanerfrit Danmark”, i.e., a Denmark free from “Mohammedans”. According to the goal of assimilation, Islam should be relegated fully to the private realm, so that in the public sphere there would still be only one Danish culture. Integration of Muslims, however, would allow for Islam also to be part of the public sphere in a way where it is recognised that Denmark is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and also multi-cultural society.

Theological approaches to Islam differ and may be summarised under the well-known terms exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist approaches. Applied to Islam an exclusivist will be hesitant to see anything divine in Islam, some would even claim that Islam is demonic, and would call for evangelism without necessarily emphasising dialogue. A pluralist would consider Islam and Christianity more or less on the same level in relation to God and mainly call for dialogue between Muslims and Christians and see no need for evangelism. An inclusivist would look for elements of truth (as seen from a Christian perspective) in Islam and call for both dialogue and evangelism.

Traditionally, those Christians who have been engaged in ministry among Muslims have engaged on one or more of the following three types of activities: (1) diaconia and social work (2) dialogue and bridge building (3) witnessing and proclamation. These approaches are based on the traditions for mission work in Africa and Asia and the tradition for church work in Denmark. In the Danish church tradition the above mentioned three types of activities have been carried out not by the official church, i.e., the local congregation, the diocese or the whole Folk Church and its leaders, but by private individuals organised in Free Church organisations such as mission societies and diaconal societies. Today, however, a discussion is going on also in Denmark about the concept of missional church, according to which the diaconal and missional activities should have their locus in the local congregations.

Danish mission organisations who were working among Muslims in Asia and Africa were the first in the church in Denmark to respond to the challenge of the presence of Muslims in Denmark. Already in 1978, when there were probably only around 20,000 Muslims in Denmark, the Danish Mission Society (DMS) and Sudanmissionen published the book “En ny tærskel”, which comprised a translation of David Brown’s booklet “A New Threshold” and articles about Islam in Europe and Islam in Denmark. The book, which with its inclusivist approach to Islam was strongly criticised from conservative groups in the Lutheran Church, advocated both witness to and friendship with Muslims (Brown 1978).

The Danish Mission Society (since 2000 united with the Danish Santalmission in Danmission) in 1984 opened “Mødestedet for indvandrere og danskere” (The Meeting Place for Immigrants and Danes) in cooperation with local parishes on Vesterbro in the central Copenhagen primarily to establish contact between Christians and Muslims. A couple of years ago Danmission established “Folkekirkens Tværkulturelle Arbejde i Odense” (The Cross-cultural Ministry of the Folk Church in Odense) in cooperation with local congregations, with the goal of welcoming both Christian and Muslim immigrants to the church. In the same vein Sudanmission in cooperation with the Folk Church congregation in Gellerup in Aarhus established a ministry among Muslims, which has now been named KIVIK, i.e., Kristent Informations og Videnscenter om Islam og Kristendom (Christian Center for Information and Knowledge about Islam and Christianity) with the aim of entering into dialogue and share the gospel with Muslims and equip local congregations to do the same.
Christian organisations, traditionally working among Christians in Denmark, such as Indre Mission (Inner Mission), Luthersk Mission (Lutheran Mission) and Kristeligt Forbund for Studerende (Christian Association for Students) have also set up ministries among Muslims in Denmark. Together with mission societies these organisations in 1994 established Tværkulturelt Center (Intercultural Centre), a networking organisation that bring together most of the organisations, and many of congregations that are involved in ministry among people of other faiths and cultures in Denmark (H. Nielsen 2000).

In 1997 a centre for dialogue between Christians and Muslims, called “Islamisk-Kristent Studiecenter”, was opened in Copenhagen. Inspired by the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations” at Selly Oak, Colleges, Birmingham, Rev. Dr. Lissi Rasmussen, who for many years has studied and practiced dialogue in Denmark and Africa, pioneered this work together with other dialogue minded Christians and Muslims. The purpose for the centre is “Through teaching, information, counselling, conversations and common praxis – to bring about a dialogue and a mutual respect among people with a Christian and a Muslim background” (Rasmussen 2000:33, my translation).

A survey conducted in 2000 indicated that only 1% of the local congregations in the Folk Church had initiated ministries addressed to Muslims (Pors & Nielsen 2000:79). Recently, however, the official Folk Church has taken initiatives to face the challenge of Muslims. In 1998 the Bishops set up a committee to consider how the Folk Church should face the multicultural and multireligious challenge. In their report “Samtalen fremmer forståelsen” (Conversation furthers understanding) (Nielsen 2000), the committee concluded that the presence of Muslims in challenged the Folk Church (1) to strengthen the Christian identity of its members (2) to build bridges between Christians and Muslims, and (3) to engage in mission among Muslims (Nielsen 2002:161-182). As a follow up to this report the bishops in seven of the 10 dioceses in the Folk Church in 2001 set up a new organisation called “Stiftssamarbejdet Folkekirke og Religionsmøde” (Cooperation between dioceses “Folk Church and Religious Encounter”), whose objective it is “on the basis of the preaching of the gospel to strengthen the encounter of the Folk Church with other religions” (Vedtægter for samarbejdet mellem stiftsøvrigheder om “Folkekirke og Religionsmøde” 2001).

Some of the Free Churches, however, have been more active in intercultural work and in work among Muslims than the Folk Church.5 A small group within certain Free Churches have employed an aggressive crusade-like rhetoric towards Muslims (e.g., Moses Hansen), but the vast majority focus on peaceful evangelism.

5 The minister for church affairs, Rev. Tove Fergo, commenting on the information that a Pentecostal congregation had baptised 50 Iranians with Muslim background, noted that Free Churches “by their very nature are much more active in mission than the Folk Church. I am really of the opinion that it would be good for the Folk Church to be inspired by them. If we believe in the holy gospel, then we also ought to make it known to people (Larsen 2002).
significant characteristic about this group is that it is a religious minority, and therefore often also feels that it is under pressure from the majority society (Pedersen 2000:82). How does this Muslim minority face the majority Christians? The statement by a member of a Muslim student organisation is typical for the Muslim community in Denmark.

Our goal is not to convert the Danes to Islam. We never engage in mission. But, in a matter of fact way we inform and answer questions about our daily life and our religion, so that people will get a more realistic idea of who we are (Marcher 1997:16)

Hardly any experts on Islam will deny that Islam in one sense or another is a missionary religion, and \textit{da'wa} (invitation to Islam) is part of the teaching of Islam. In an article about \textit{da'wa} in Western Europe. But as Lars Pedersen observe, “The scepticism and hostility that Islam encounters in the West necessitates that Muslims state that \textit{da'wa} is not directed against non-Muslims” (Pedersen 1991:147, my translation). When we analyse the situation in more depth, however, we will not doubt find out that Muslims in Denmark have quite different understandings of \textit{da'wa} and also have quite different ideas of how to face Christianity, Christian and the so-called Christian society.

Muslims in Denmark are, like Muslims in other parts of the world, divided among Sunni and Shi’a Islam, but it seems that the most important divisions have to do with the ethnic origin of the Muslims in Denmark. The largest groups of Muslims are those with a Turkish and a Pakistani background. Others come from Morocco, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia etc. Many mosques and other religious and social organisations seem to be organised primarily according to ethnic lines, and this ethnic affiliation probably influences the way they as Muslims face Christians.

Another very important parameter seems to be what kind of relation they have to their Muslim faith and practice. Similar to Hans Ravn Iversen’s grouping of Christians, it seems that Muslims may be also be grouped in three sections: (1) secularised cultural Muslims with almost no religious practice but who still are influenced by Islamic values (2) traditional Muslims whose religious identity is strongly tied to their ethnic identity and whose level of religious practice may vary (3) activist Muslims whose religious identity is not primarily tied to ethnicity but to one or the other trans-ethnic interpretation of Islam.

The way Muslims face Christians in Denmark will probably also be related to their general approach to the Danish society. Here we may find a parallel to the approaches of various political and other groups towards Muslims. (1) Isolation. Some Muslims want to limit the contact with non-Muslims to an absolute minimum. (2) Integration. Other Muslims want to maintain their Islamic identity also in the public sphere while they participate as much as possible in the Danish society. (3) Assimilation. A third approach is for Muslims to try to become as Danish as possible thereby avoiding Islamic appearances in public.

Traditionally, Islam has been spread in two different ways, either top-down or bottom-up. According to the top-down method a geographical area, a country or a community is included in the Islamic world for example following a jihad and Islamic law, \textit{shari’a}, is introduced. When this Islamic ambience has been created, the inhabitants may over time become Muslims. In Denmark there are groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir that seems to favour this approach. According to the bottom-up method, individuals are converted to Islam through \textit{da’wa}, and such conversions may in the long run affect the society from bottom to top. With few exceptions those Muslim groups who
are actively concerned about spreading the Islamic faith to non-Muslims in Denmark favour this method.

The term *da’wa*, however, has different dimensions and has been interpreted differently. Some Muslim groups mainly emphasise the internal aspect of *da’wa*, according to which the efforts are directed towards Muslims in order to strengthen their Islamic faith and practice. Other Muslim groups, without neglecting the internal aspect of *da’wa*, underline the external aspect of *da’wa* which aims at presenting Islam to non-Muslims in the hope that they become Muslims.

When engaging in the external form of *da’wa*, three different approaches to Christians may be identified, also in the Danish Muslim discourse. (1) The supercessionist position. Here the Qur’anic principle of “abrogation” (*tansikh*) according to which a later verse abrogates an earlier one, to the history of religions, so that the Qur’anic revelation of Islam abrogates the authority of the (earlier) religion of Christianity. Christianity has been fully superseded by Islam. *Da’wa* according to this position is often controversialist, an example of which is the writings of Ahmad Deedat which are also distributed by certain Muslim groups in Denmark. (2) The revisionist position. According to this position Christianity as a revealed religion being based on natural religion (*din al-fitra*) is in harmony with Islam, but the truth of the gospel has been corrupted by generations of Christians. The goal of *da’wa* according to this position is to bring Christians back to the original truth. (3) The ecumenical position. This position advocates a pluralistic approach according to which there is not need for Christians to become Muslims. The purpose of *da’wa* then is to invite Muslims and Christians into dialogue of mutual self-criticism (Kerr 2000:160-162).

The external *da’wa* has traditionally taken two forms. (1) Life style *da’wa* and. (2) Direct *da’wa* through preaching, distribution of literature etc. The question about who in the Islamic community is supposed to be involved in *da’wa* has been answered differently by different groups. Some charge the whole *umma* with this responsibility, while others point to special individuals and groups who should be trained for this purpose (Bektovic 2000).

Even a cursory reading of Muslim literature distributed in Denmark and Danish Muslim websites reveals that Muslim groups in Denmark are concerned about *da’wa* and are engaging in *da’wa*. On the website islam.dk a guide to prospective converts is advertised on how to become a Muslim and a number of conversion accounts from Denmark and other countries are also available there. On the same website a so-called “starting kit” (StartPakken) with the basic literature on Islam, a prayer rug, compass, calendar, prayer timetables for salat etc. is advertised. This “starting kit”, which is addressed to converts, young Muslims and other Muslims in need of this, is prepared in a cooperation between a number of Islamic organizations and individuals. It would, however, require more research to outline the most significant *da’wa* activities carried out by Muslims in Denmark.

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6 A search on google.com for web Danish websites with *da’wa* and *da’wah* gives 84 hits, most of which are Muslim sources. On the website islam.dk a guide to prospective converts is advertised on how to become a Muslim and a number of conversion accounts from Denmark and other countries are also available there. On the same website a so-called “starting kit” (StartPakken) with the basic literature on Islam, a prayer rug, compass, calendar, prayer timetables for salat etc. is advertised. This “starting kit”, which is addressed to converts, young Muslims and other Muslims in need of this, is prepared in a cooperation between a number of Islamic organizations and individuals. Among the participating organisations are Det Islamiske Trossamfund (Waqf), Independent Scandinavian Relief Agency (ISRA), Islam.dk, Murabitun c/o AbdAllah Tolstrup, Zahra Bookshop c/o Abdul Wahid Pedersen.
4. CONVERSION TO ISLAM – CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

After a short overview of the sources and the methodology employed for the analysis of conversions between Islam and Christianity, the converts from Islam to Christianity and from Christianity to Islam are introduced and their accounts analysed.

Sources and Methodology

Since the religious affiliation of the inhabitants of Denmark is not recorded (apart from the membership of the Folk Church in Denmark), nobody knows for sure the exact number of Christians and Muslims in Denmark. The exact number of converts from Islam to Christianity and from Christianity to Islam is even more difficult to estimate. Christian leaders involved with ministry among Muslims estimate that between 300 and 500 Muslims have converted to Christianity. The Danish convert, Imam Abdul Wahid Pedersen, estimates that about 5000 Danes have converted to Islam. There is no doubt, however, that the number of converts to Islam by far exceeds the number of converts to Christianity. A fairly safe estimate is that the number of converts to Christianity is a few hundreds, whereas the number of converts to Islam is a few thousands.

A number of converts to Christianity and to Islam have published their conversion story or have been interviewed to Newspapers and magazines. The number of accounts of conversions to Islam, however, is much higher than of conversions to Christianity, and often converts to Christianity are referred to only by pseudonym and without specific information that might help the reader to identify the convert. The reason seems to be that Muslims who leave their faith and community perceive that their conversion might attract negative reactions from the Muslim community or even persecution; whereas Christians who convert to Islam do not perceive that their conversion will endanger their welfare. In Denmark freedom of religion is guaranteed all, including the right to convert from one religion to another, but according to Islam law, which in some respect may still inform some Muslims though they live under Danish law, there is no freedom to leave Islam, and apostasy is punishable by death.

In this initial exploratory research, I have selected 6 accounts of Muslims converting to Christianity and 7 accounts of Christians converting to Islam, from among the available published accounts. The selection does not in any sense claim to be representative, but these 13 accounts are only selected in order to be able to identity aspects of conversion processes in a Danish context within the last 20 years. The conversion accounts, which vary a lot concerning the details about the spiritual journey of the converts, present the converts’ perception of their own conversion, or at least what they want the readers to know about their conversion.

These 13 conversion accounts will be briefly analysed. A variety of models, based on decision process thinking have been developed, but for the purposes of this study I have chosen an

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8 Lissi Rasmussen, who is a pastor in Copenhagen in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark reports that she has over the years baptized about 25 former Muslims, incl. children In the Pentecostal Church in Odense about 50 former Muslims, primarily from Iran, have been baptized (Larsen 2002).
adaptation of the conversion model developed by Allan R. Tippett using Van Gennep’s theory of rites of passage and his own study of conversion in the Pacific Islands (1974). This is a simplified model that is useful in analyzing the spiritual journey of people in Denmark converting to Christianity or Islam.

This model underscores that the communication of the gospel is not a single event, but a series of communicational events that form process or a spiritual journey. The conversion process is here depicted as consisting of three phases: the awareness phase, the conversion phase, and the incorporation phase. These three phases might also be considered as three dimensions of the conversion process: the dimension of awareness, the dimension of conversion, and the dimension of incorporation.

Whereas Tippett in his original model has a fourth phase, the maturation phase, I follow Seppo Syrjänen, who in his research of the conversion of Muslims in Pakistan combines this phase with the phase of incorporation (1987:63-66). The phase of incorporation in this study therefore has no definite end, rather it continues throughout the life of the converts; similarly, the awareness phase has no definite beginning. 9

The movement from the awareness phase to the conversion phase is not marked by any observable events; and often the two phases overlap. The awareness of the gospel, that is the understanding of Christianity as an alternative to one’s present way of life, may come to individuals or groups by way of discovery, through a natural development, through pressure from without, through the internal pressure of a crisis situation, or through direct advocacy. When the receptor has not only been exposed to the gospel message, but has also understood it so well that he/she is ready to respond to it meaningfully, either positively or negatively, he/she has entered the conversion phase. In the conversion phase, the receptor begins to consider the gospel and its implications for him/her and finally makes a conscious decision to become a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of the church. In my research, I have considered the initiation rite of baptism, which confirms the convert’s change of religious faith and his/her transfer to the religious community of the church, to be the point of transition between the conversion phase and the incorporation phase.

9 In Tippett’s original model, the four phases are clearly separated by observable events. The point of realization separates the awareness phase and the conversion phase, the point of decision (or encounter) separates the conversion phase and the incorporation phases, and finally the point of consummation (or confirmation) separates the incorporation phase and the maturation phase. Implicit in his model, however, is an understanding of conversion, which is based on a bounded set theory. Tippett’s model, however, does not do full justice to the theological understanding of conversion as a very dynamic process as outlined above, according to which the crucial issue is the direction of the movement. Here the centered sets model may better help us understand and describe conversion. Whereas the bounded sets model emphasizes the relationship of the individual or group to certain boundaries, the centered sets model focuses on the relationship of the individual to the center, which is God/Allah. Here the critical issue is whether a person is moving toward a new center. Conversion, then, is manifested in the act of changing directions (Hiebert 1978:26-29)
Analysis of Stories of Conversion to Christianity

After a short description of each of the 6 converts to Christianity, the conversion accounts will be analysed. First some personal data, as far as they are available in the sources, will be presented. Then each of the three phases in the conversion process will be analysed in terms of significant factors and dynamics.

Short Descriptions of the Converts

Shadi
Shadi was born in Iran. In 1986, when she was 9 years old, she came to Denmark to be reunited with her father, who had fled from Iran two years earlier. The family lives in a town in Jylland. When she was 14 she participated in the confirmation class in Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and was baptised. It was, however, only two years later that she according to her own evaluation really became a Christian. She is the only Christian in her family (Munck-Fairwood 1998)

Massoud
Massoud was born in Iran. In 1988, when he was 15 years old, he fled from Iran to avoid military service. Some time later his mother also came to Denmark as a refugee and became a Christian. Later in 1996 Massoud became a Christian. Today, he is a Danish citizen and studies theology as is a pastor for a group of mainly Iranian Christians in the Pentecostal Church in Odense (Frederiksen 2001; Munksgaard 2002).

Yassin
Yassin was born in Iraq. After 9 years in the army and including participation in the wars against Iran and Kuwait, he fled to Jordan. After a year in Jordan he was recognized as convention refugee and was granted asylum in Denmark in 1994. In the process of his conversion he was in contact with the Meeting Place, run by the Danish Mission Society and local parishes in the Folk Church in Copenhagen. In 1998 he was employed by Emdrup Church in Copenhagen (Weinkouff 1998)

Habib
Habib was born in Iran. In 1999 he came to Denmark as a political refugee. He fled to Denmark via Canada with his wife and their 6 year old son. He and his family became Christians while they were residing in an asylum centre. At the time of his baptism he had not been granted asylum (Munck-Fairwood 2001)

Gholam
Gholam was born in Iran. In 2000 he came to Denmark as a refugee, due to political persecution, leaving his wife and his little daughter in Iran. Within the first 10 months of his stay in Denmark he came in contact with Christian Iranians in the Pentecostal Church in Odense and was baptised. At the time of his baptism, he had not been granted asylum (Eriksen 2001).
Bahram
Bahram was born in Iran. He was trained in Iran in an insurance company. He fled Iran in 2000 because of political persecution. In 2001 he came into contact with Christian Iranians in the Pentecostal Church in Odense and was baptised, 29 years old. At the time of his baptism, he had not been granted asylum (Kirk 2001; Larsen 2002)

Personal Data
Five of the six converts come from Iran, and the last convert from Iraq. Although no statistics are available, it seems that a very high percentage of all the converts in Denmark come from Iran. Further research is required to determine what the reasons may be.

Five of the six converts are men, but for two of them the whole family are Christians. From other studies about conversion from Islam to Christianity, it seems that it is after all easier for men to convert to Christianity than women.

Apart from the young girl who was baptised when she was only 14, all the others seem to have been in their 20s when they converted to Christianity. Massoud had spent 8 years in Denmark, before he converted, whereas the three other men converted to Christianity within a couple of years. It would be interesting to find out in which phase of their integration into Denmark, conversion is most likely.

The Awareness Phase
It is interesting to know what relationship the converts had to Islam before they converted. Massoud seems to have continued to practice Islam after he came to Denmark and up to the time when he converted to Christianity. His parents and Massoud himself were orthodox Muslims who considered Islam to be the last and truest religion meant for all mankind. Others, like Gholam, grew up in orthodox Muslim homes but had lost their Islamic faith due to the oppression from an Islamic regime and were only nominal Muslims. Habib expresses it in this way: “My previous religion was my family’s religion. It was not in my heart” (Munck-Fairwood 2001, my translation). Shadi is an example of a convert who grew up in a Muslim family that was not very religious.

How did the converts become aware of Christianity? First of all, having come to a country where the vast majority were Christians an encounter with Christianity was almost inevitable. In Yassin’s opinion “Christianity has quite visibly influenced the Danish culture” (Weinkouff 1998, my translation). Shadi met Christianity in the form of here class mates in primary school and her attendance of the confirmation class and a Christian youth fellowship. Habib is an example of a convert who was contacted by local Christians while they were still in the asylum centre.

A church near our asylum centre invited the inhabitants for a cross-cultural dinner and evening song in the church. We went there, though we were Muslims. We even entered the church room. I did not understand the Bible text, because it was in Danish, but I understood that they sang about God and talked about Jesus. Being thee in the church had a strong emotional impact on me.. It was a good experience. Nobody asked what religion wee had. Nobody advertised Christianity or encouraged us to
convert. People were just friendly and welcoming. Nobody said that they did not trust us because we were Muslims (Munck-Fairwood 2001, my translation).

For him Denmark was the place of religious freedom where he could realise his dream of becoming a Christian.

For Massoud the most significant contact was with his mother who had become a Christian before him. For other Iranian converts an Iranian Christian fellowship played a significant role.10

In Iran there are a few Christian churches and some of the converts from Iran have probably also met Christians there. Habib’s aunt lived near a Christian church, and Habib said that he often had enter the church, but could not do so because he was a Muslim.

Later I got to know some Christians they were quiet and kind people, and I was very interested in their faith. But I knew that it was impossible to convert to Christianity in Iran. It is quite simply forbidden Munck-Fairwood 2002, my translation).

The converts got their information about Christianity from Christian friends and from participating in Christian programs, either Danish or Iranian Christians. Apart from that the reading of the Bible played a significant role for their conversion (Massoud, Yassin). Yassin reports that

When I began to read in the New Testament, I felt that Jesus spoke directly to my emotions. Jesus talks about forgiveness, peace and love. It gave me an inner peace that I did not know before, for here was a God that I needed not be afraid of (Weinkouff 1998:19, my translation).

The Decision Phase

Why did the converts get frustrated with Islam? For some Islam was closely associated with what they wanted to escape in their homeland, such as political oppression and war (Yassin, Gholam, Massoud, Habib, and Bahram). For some the lack of assurance of salvation in Islam was a problem (Yassin, Massoud). Massoud said that

I could not come close enough to God (in Islam). I felt that it was difficult to have to live all your life without knowing whether you would end up in Paradise or Hell (Frederiksen 2001, my translation).

What was it that attracted them to Christianity to the extent that they decided to become Christians? Following what was said above, assurance of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ played a significant role for some of them. Others report that the warm fellowship in the congregations was very attractive (e.g., Gholam), or they point to the focus on love in the Christian religion (e.g. Bahram).

10 This applies not only to Gholam, but also to many other Iranian converts (Kirk 2001; Eriksen 2001; Larsen 2002). In Iran there are a few Christian churches and some of the converts from Iran have probably also met Christians there. Habib’s aunt lived near a Christian church, and Habib said that he often had wished to enter the church, but could not do so because he was a Muslim (Munck-Fairwood 2002).
Some converts dreams also seem to have played a significant role in helping them to commit themselves to Christianity (Ghulam). Saida, who is from Iran and not among the 6 converts studied in detail her, regularly visited the Meeting Place in Copenhagen and even attended services.

“Once when my children were small, they were very sick. One night Jesus appeared to me in a dream, and the following day they were well again. Therefore I have several times, both in Iran and here in Denmark visited a church to pray”. “But Saida”, I then say, “are you not a Muslim, how come that you go to a Christian church to pray?” Saida is quiet for a moment.…”When I pray to Allah, I do not receive answer; when I pray to Jesus I receive help.” (Rønne 2002, my translation).

There may, however, also be other less spiritual factors at work. Shadi’s parents worked hard to become as Danish as possible, and Shadi followed suit.

When I was 14 years old, my class were to be confirmed. My goal was to become as Danish as possible, so I also wanted to be confirmed. My family was Muslim, but were not very religious, so I was allowed to do so. Then both my sister and I were taught by the pastor’s wife every Friday for a year. We did not understand much, but this was what we wanted (Munck-Fairwood 1998, my translation).

Later on she experienced to have a personal faith in God, and this helped here to find her identity as both Iranian, Danish and Christian at the same time. Still, however, she pointed out that

One of the big advantages by being a Christian is that I have a Danish circle of acquaintances. When I experience something negative, such as racism, my Danish friends help me to understand how the Danes think. I have a bunch of Danes around me that I trust – the confidence is mutual. It is like a family that God has blessed me with (Munck-Fairwood 1998, my translation).

This sociological dimension of conversion to Christianity has been highlighted in the press in connection with the application for asylum from converts from Islam to Christianity. Habib, Gholam and Bahram all were baptised before they granted asylum. Did the desire to be granted asylum play any role in their conversion? All of them deny it. Gholam claims that he no longer fears to have his application for asylum turned down. “Whether I am in Denmark or in Iran does not mean much to me because I can serve Jesus in both places!” (Eriksen 2001, my translation). Though many experts agree with the Iranian converts that their life may be in danger due to the Islamic law of apostasy if they are sent back to Iran, the governmental refugee authorities say that they dare not give asylum to converted Muslims, because they doubt the genuineness of the conversions (Kirk 2001)

The Incorporation Phase

Some of the converts in this sample are incorporated in ordinary congregations in the Folk Church (Yassin, Shadi), while others – from Iran – have joined an Iranian congregation that is associated with the Pentecostal Church. This Iranian congregation led by an Iranian pastor has experienced an extraordinary growth over the last 4 years. About 50 converts from Islam (most of them Iranians)
have been baptised and about 35 of them belong to this congregation. Further research is required to find out how converts feel at home in various types of congregations.

The present data does yield much information about how the converts feel accepted by Christians (i.e., the ethnic Danes) after their conversion. Shadi apparently felt well received by her closest friends whereas she felt that some other Danes treated her negatively. Yassin was accepted by a Lutheran congregation that employed him to work as kind of a deacon, and the Iranian congregation was welcomed in the Pentecostal church.

Another aspect of the incorporation of the converts in the Christian community is the establishment of families. Some of the converts were already married at the time of conversion and their wives and children were converted together with them. In one case, the converted man married a Christian lady also converted from Islam, but from another ethnic group. It requires further research to find out what is the general trend concerning marriage of converts, whether they predominantly marry Danish Christian ladies or Christian ladies with a Muslim background.

The Iranian asylum seekers felt that the authorities in Denmark had no compassion on them when they through their conversion to Christianity foresaw serious problems if they were returned to Iran. Reflecting on this situation the Iranian pastor in the Pentecostal Church in Odense observes about the attitude of the Danish refugee authorities that

First, it prevents Muslims from becoming Christians. Second, it stops the integration completely. We ought to be much more open about taking these people’s wish to convert seriously (Larsen 2002).

Here the Iranian pastor sees conversion from Islam to Christianity in Denmark to be a possible element in the integration of Iranians. Others, such as Muslim leaders, might consider this an element in assimilation. All converts do, as Shadi experienced it personally, face the challenge of establishing a new identity that accommodates both their original Iranian (or another ethnic) identity with their new Christian and Danish identity.

This identity formation is often rendered difficult by the rejection from their family and ethnic community that converts often experience in connection with their conversion. One of the convert expresses it this way:

Before I took the decision (to convert to Christianity), I had underestimated the price. On the other hand I had also underestimated the blessing and peace I now feel (Frederiksen 2001).

The price he had to pay was both economic and relational. When he converted to Christianity, his former Muslim customers boycotted his bakery. When his family in Iran happened to hear about his conversion, his father got very angry and said that he would no longer have anything to do with him. Years later, however, he is again on talking terms with his father. In spite of the general rejection from Muslims, he is still in contact with Muslims and also has friends among Muslims.
Analysis of stories of conversion to Islam

After a short description of each of the 7 converts to Islam, the conversion accounts will be analysed. First some personal data, as far as they are available in the sources, will be presented. Then the each of the three phases in the conversion process will be analysed in terms of significant factors and dynamics. I should be noted here that the data yields more information about the converts to Islam than about the converts to Christianity.

Short Descriptions of the Converts

Reino
Reino is born in Denmark and is 48 years old. He studied anthropology at the University, but from his 21st to his 25th year he spent most of his time travelling in Africa and the East. After a couple of years as a practicing Hindu, he came in contact with Muslims in Denmark and in 1982 converted to Islam. Presently, he is the principal of an Islamic school in Copenhagen, imam, leader of an Islamic Aid organisation and vice-chairman of Islamic Christian Study Centre in Copenhagen. He is married to a Muslim lady from Morocco. Today he calls himself Abdul Wahid (Pedersen 2002; Clausen 2002)

Asija
Asija is born in Denmark. She converted to Islam some time after she had married a Muslim man. Her original name is not known (Kristensen 2002).

Aishah
Aishah is born in Denmark. After 18 years active service in the Jehovah Witness, she converted to Islam in 1991. Her original name is not known (Fahim 2002).

Martin
Martin is born in Denmark. He fist came in contact with Muslims while he as a student was residing in a student hostel in Herlev near Copenhagen, in 1997. He converted to Islam the same year. Today he is married to a Muslim lady from Pakistan and is a teacher in an Islamic primary school. His Muslim name is Musa (Halskov & Røjgaard 2001).

Peter
Peter is born in Denmark. He grew up in a suburb to Aarhus. In 1998 he came in contact with Muslims, and half a year later he was offered a teaching position in an American school in Egypt. While he was there in 1999, he converted to Islam, 20 years old. He returned to Denmark and was married to a Muslim lady from Algeria in 2000. Today he is an office trainee in Copenhagen (Thomsen 2001b).

Jakob
Jakob is born in Denmark. He first came in contact with Muslims when he travelled through the Sahara desert in 1991. Together with his girlfriend and cohabiter he converted to Islam in 2000. He is today a professional text writer in Copenhagen (Werdelin 2002).
Kari
Kari is born in Denmark. She grew up in Roskilde, and now lives with her father in Copenhagen. In 2000, when she was 17 years old, she converted to Islam. Today she works as sponsor contact for the Muslim aid organisation, ISRA, in Copenhagen. Her Muslim name is Amina (Thorup 2001)

**Personal Data**

One of the converts was only 17 when she converted to Islam (Amina), one of them was probably in her early 40s (Aishah) and the remaining 5 seem to be in their (early) 20s when they became Muslims.

Four of the converts are men, three women. While most of the first converts to Islam in Denmark were women who had married a Muslim man (like Asija), in recent years the number of men who convert every year seem to exceed the number of women.11

Five of the conversions took place within the last 5 years, one 11 and one 20 years ago, and one is unknown.

**The Awareness Phase**

None of the converts seem to have been practicing Christians (belonging to the Folk Church or a Free Church), and most of them come from homes where Christianity played a very small role. Peter’s home is fairly typical. “We never talked very much about Christianity or any other religion. We sang the Christmas hymns and visited the church once a year” (Thomsen 2001). One of the converts, however, had been an active member of Jehovah Witness for 18 years prior to her conversion (Aishah), and others had been involved with New Age and Eastern religions (Jakob, Reino). Reino had even resigned his membership of the Folk Church years before his conversion.

I was brought up in a fairly ordinary Danish home and had no real relationship with God when I was a child. In my early youth my mother had given me a book about Chinese philosophy, Earthly Happiness by Lin Yutang, which made me begin to think along existential lines. I was confirmed like my age mates, but began at the same time to consider whether I really belonged in the Danish Folk Church or it was only something I was culturally conditioned to feel. When I was 16 resigned my membership of the church in order not to be there on a false basis. Now I wanted to find out where I really belonged and I felt that this could best be done if I was free. I therefore did not resign out of protest but simply in order not to be a hypocrite until I had made my choice (Pedersen 2002, my translation).

It seems that before encounter Islam a number of the converts had felt a spiritual and/or moral emptiness and were looking for answers to their existential questions.12 As can be seen from this

11 This hypothesis is based on observations of reports of conversion in the press and in the mailing list dfc.dk (Danmarks Forenede Cybermuslimer, The Danish United Cyber Muslims), attached to the website www.islam.dk., and from conversations with Muslims.
quote and from other conversion accounts Christianity and the church did not really play any role and was not seen as a viable option for a spiritual life. Before Martin decided to convert to Islam he had a secure life with a girlfriend, but he was not happy. “If I had just continued like that, I would just have ended up in a bigger apartment with another girl friend. But it was an empty life, and I missed some spiritual and moral values” (Halskov & Røjgaard 2001, my translation).

How did the converts first become aware of Islam? Five converts met Islam through Muslim friends. Martin is a typical example of the importance of Muslim acquaintances and friends. While living in a student hostel Martin met two Iraqi men who – though they were not practicing Muslims – introduced him to their religion and culture. Shortly afterwards in a badminton club he met a Pakistani man who was a strong believer in Islam. Together with another Muslim they had daily conversations with Peter about Islam and answered his questions (Halskov & Røjgaard 2001). Asija is an example of a woman who falls in love with a man who happens to be a Muslim.

My first encounter with Islam started in my marriage. Even before I became a Muslim I had submitted to many of Islam’s laws such as not to eat pork and drink alcohol. At that time I was convinced that a marriage could very well function in spite of two different cultures and religions. Eating habits was not that all important, if we only could respect each other’s life style and “meet in the middle” (Kristensen 2002, my translation).

It was in the context of her happy marriage with her Muslim husband that she after having begun to follow some of the Islamic precepts go to know the deeper values of Islam.

Two of the converts first came into close contact with Muslims and thereby with Islam through travels in Muslim countries in Africa and Asia (Reino, Jakob), but for both of them contact with Muslim friends in Denmark also played a significant role. Living in a Muslim country (Egypt) apparently contributed significantly to the conversion of Peter, who had previously been in contact with Islam in Denmark.

The Decision Phase

None of the converts seem to have come from homes where the Christian faith played a significant role or to have been practicing Christians. The data from this sample however does not give us more insight into the converts’ evaluation of Christianity than was presented in the above section. When we in this section consider what attracted the converts to Islam we may indirectly conclude something about their evaluation of Christianity and the church.

Peter’s brief description of his first impression of Islam reflects what many converts apparently feel when they consider becoming Muslims. Peter stated clearly that it was the encounter with two Turkish young men of his own age that opened his eyes to Islam.

12 Martin seems to have been in a spiritual crisis before he became a Muslim. He would spend much time alone, sitting in his room and staring into the air while he thought over the meaning of life. It did not make sense to him that he had been planted on the earth by accident without any purpose. He studied Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism without finding any answer (Thomsen 2001).
First, I thought they were crazy when they would not go out and get drunk. But then I got curious to and felt strongly attracted by the fact that together with them I could very naturally discuss the big issues in life without a lot of alcohol on the table. I was fascinated that the Qur’an contains answers to the big as well as the small questions in life. It shows exactly how you must live to be a good Muslim. Christianity does not have similar rules, so it easily becomes sort of a “Sunday religion”. As a Muslim you are reminded of the greatness of Allah at least five times a day (Thomsen 2001, my translation). 13

First, Peter points to the moral values he sees in the lives of his Muslim friends. When Asija’s Muslim husband began to practice his religion more consistently, she saw moral and spiritual changes in his life that she appreciated and that attracted herself to Islam. Similarly when girl friend and cohabiter decided to convert to Islam, Jakob saw a transformation in her life. She looked 10 years younger.

My (then) girlfriend and he began to practice the Islamic gender roles, somehow just to try it out. Immediately our perpetual confusion, bickering and out mutual insecurity disappeared. We were revived to the joy of being mutually complementary parts of our relationship. In the Qur’an Islam is described as “the natural way of life/arrangement” – we were more in love with each other than when we met for the first time. I realised that this was the sign I had waited for - a spirituality which is practicable in the world, here and now. A reflection of the fruit and wine of Paradise, in the midst of the cement town of Copenhagen in the year 2000 (Werdelin 2001, my translation).

Second, Peter points to the importance of the Qur’an as a source of wisdom in life. Most of the other converts also point to the central role that the reading of the Qur’an played for their decision to become Muslims. Jakob encountered the Qur’an three years before he actually converted to Islam. When reading A. S. Madsen’s Danish translation of the Qur’an he rejected its message based on his modern “secular” Christian and New Age background as irrelevant.

And still … There were things in the Qur’an that hi me, sudden drops that burned their way across this unhandy translation and my own complacent and proud “enlightened understanding” about how the facts of the matter are – so I hastened to close the Book and do what any civilized man would do, that its, open the TV in stead” (Werdelin 2001, my translation).

Martin, who began to study the Qur’an shortly before his conversion, felt that if he could show that the Qur’an was not true he could reject the challenge from his Muslim friends, but if the Qur’an was true, he would have to convert to Islam (Halskov & Røjgaard 2001).

13 Asked about the most common conversion motives for Danes converting to Islam, imam Abdul Wahid Pedersen (Reino) points to the family values in Islam and concrete and practical guidelines for life wanted by young people. Imam Fatih Alev points to a renewed interest in the Qur’an after the September 11 events and Tim Jensen points out that for young people today Islam is a way to express opposition to society (Thomsen 2001a).
For Aishah, who as a Jehovah Witness was very familiar with the Bible, it was a small booklet by Ahmed Deedat about Muhammad in the Bible that spurred her on to the study of the Qur’an and finally led her to conclude that certain passages in the Bible had been corrupted and that the Qur’an was the true and final message from God (Fahim 2002). For Jacob the “revelation” came when he read the Bewley translation for three weeks. “I have read many splendid philosophical works, and I am myself a professional text writer, and at once I knew that what I had in my hands did not come from a man” (Werdelin 2001, my translation). For all of them, it seems that they feel that based on the Qur’an they get logical answers to their questions.

Third, Peter points to the values of the ordered ritual life. What impressed Reino, who had been a practicing Hindu for two years, when he visited some European converts to Islam was their disciplined ritual life. In the middle of the night he was woke up when he heard the call to prayer. He concluded that if they really got out of bed at that time of the night, washed and started praying, this had to be something more powerful than his own occasional prayers. Therefore he got out of bed and joined in their prayers knowing that somehow they were praying to their creator. It was after their prayer that he began to ask questions about their religion. After discussions about Islam for the next two or three days he decided to become a Muslim (Pedersen 2002).

The case of Reino points to the critically important role of individual Muslims who guided and directed these people towards and through conversion. In almost all the conversion accounts we can trace the role of individual or groups of Muslims who played this role. Asija, who was married to a Muslim man, sought out a Muslim sister who over a period instructed her in Islam by answering her questions and by challenging her with her own questions (Kristensen 2002).

The Incorporation Phase

Apart from Peter, all the converts seem to have taken Muslim names that to signify to all who meet them that they belong to the Muslim umma. Female converts start following an Islamic dress code including the wearing of veils in public and the Islamic food laws including the prohibition of pork and alcohol.

Some of the conversion accounts contain data about the effect of the conversion on their relationship with family and friends. The news of the conversion for some converts meant that family and friends reacted very negatively towards them. In most cases the relationship with the family is restored after some time, whereas some loose all or some of their non-Muslim friends whereas other were able to keep the friendships.

None of the converts lives in a mixed marriage. In one case the couple converted more or less at them same time (Jakob), in another case the convert was already married to a Muslim (Asija), others have married a Muslim lady from a non-Danish ethnic group after their conversion (Peter, Reino, Martin). It would be interesting to find out if it is a general tendency that converts to Islam marry Muslim ladies from a non-Danish ethnic background and become integrated into various ethnically non-Danish subcultures. Peter pointed out that in his marriage with a Pakistani Muslim lady they follow Muslim traditions concerning family life. Asked whether a Danish girl would accept this he answered, “No, but now I am married to a Muslim girl. I do not mind Danish girls, but I was more attracted to the foreign culture that my wife comes from” (Halskov & Røjgaard 2001, my translation).
Aishah focuses on the need for all Muslims in Denmark to unite and seek protection in groups so that their children will be well prepared to face future problems. She warns against the bad influence from non-Muslims and from bad Muslims.

Muslims should be on the guard against integration since it is impossible to be fully integrated (in the Danish society) if you follow the rules of Allah. Satan wishes to pull all (Muslims) down to the low and immoral level on which many Danes live (Fahim 2002, my translation)

For her, as for other converts the Islamic identity seems to be primary. And since integration into the Muslim umma sometimes involves integration into the subculture of a certain ethnic group, conversion may for some lead to a situation where the converts besides their Danish identity develop an affinity to another ethnic group.

It requires further research to detect the sociological long term effects of conversion to Islam.

5. CONCLUSION

The present paper does not present any conclusive research concerning mission and da’wa and conversions between Islam and Christianity, but as an initial exploratory research it has aimed at presenting the broad outline of this topic and certain perspectives for further research. The paper has shown that some research has been carried out or is being carried out in other Western countries, but only concerning conversion to Islam. Conversion to Christianity in the West is still a virgin field. In Denmark no research has so far been conducted concerning conversions between Islam and Christianity. Such a research will be complicated due to the sensitive nature of the data, but not impossible. Some research has been carried out about the Muslim community in Denmark, but since the history of Islam in Denmark is so short and since the Muslim community as well as the Danish context of this community is undergoing many changes these days, much more research is needed. The Christian mission among Muslims and the Islamic da’wa among Christians in Denmark have not been researched very much. This topic is of course also quite sensitive, but handled with much care it should be possible to research it, at least partially. This initial exploration of the whole topic of mission/da’wa and conversion between Islam and Christianity has further indicated that there may be very interesting parallels that it would be interesting to analyse.14

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