Migration and Conversion -
The Conversion of Immigrants to Christianity in a Danish Context
Mogens S. Mogensen

Over the last 30 – 40 years Denmark has developed from a very mono-religious to a more multi-religious society. The background for this change has primarily been migration of workers and of refugees. Migrants from Africa, Asia and the Balkans with an Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist or another religious background have established new non-Christian religious communities in Denmark.

In the same period we have seen an increasing number of religious conversions. In the 1970s and 1980s the focus was on Danes converting to religions from the East and to the so-called New Age movements, and since the 1990s conversions to Islam have attracted a lot of attention. Most studies of conversion in Denmark have analysed the conversion of Danes (most often with a Christian background) to these new religions, which were brought to Denmark by immigrants. This study, however, will focus on the often overlooked phenomenon of immigrants converting from Islam and other religions to Christianity.

Migration and religious change

Often there is a connection between migration and religious change. We may distinguish between three processes of religious change that are related to the migrants’ adaptation to and survival in their new host society.

(1) The migrants stick to their pre-migration religion, which, however, often undergoes changes in the new context.

In a study of South Asian immigrants in the US Raymond Bradley Williams concludes that

Immigrants are religious – by all counts more religious than they were before they left home – because religion is one of the important identity markers that helps them preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in a group. … Apart from its spiritual dimension, religion is a major force in social participation; it develops and at the same time sacralises one’s self-identity, and thus the religious bond is one of the strongest social ties (Williams 1988:11).

While they continue to adhere to the religion they belonged to in their original home country, they will often – under the influence of the new context - reinterpret their religion in a way that leads to changes in religious practice, doctrines and organisation. This adherence to their original religion (and culture) has the potential both to impede and to further the integration of the immigrants. It may lead to a separation from the surrounding society and the creation of ghettos. Their adherence to their pre-migration religion, however, may also in the long run advance their integration. For immigrants cultural and religious communities rooted in the culture and religion of their homeland may stabilise their identity in a difficult transition period and give them a sense of safety and security and thereby become for them a solid platform from which they may venture into the new host society and enter into the process of integration (Baumann 2004:26ff; Baumann 2002:7-10).

(2) Migrants who stick to their pre-migration religion contribute to the spreading of their own religion to the indigenous people in their new host country.
Processes of religious change may be explained with reference to diffusion-theories. When talking about diffusion of innovations, including religious innovations, we may distinguish between “expansion diffusion”, when people adopt the religious innovation through direct contact, and “relocation diffusion”, when the religious innovation is brought to new places for example through migration. The most common process of diffusion, also regarding the spread of religions, however, involves a combination of the two forms of diffusion. A physical “relocation” leads a group of religious people to a new place, thereby bringing the religious innovation to this place. Then follows an “expansion diffusion”, when this religious group enters into direct contact on a daily basis with the indigenous people. This type of “expansion diffusion” may be called “contagious diffusion”, but might also in our context be described as “contact conversion” (Park 1994:99-100).

(3) Migrants adapt to the new context by leaving their pre-migration religion and perhaps joining the predominant religion of the country to which they have migrated.

The desire to achieve a social integration and to gain acceptance in their new host country may lead some immigrants to choose to lay aside their cultural and religious peculiarities (de-conversion), and some may go all the way and join the religion of the majority (conversion). Based on studies in Germany Martin Baumann has observed that

In der neuen Umwelt können die heimatlichen religiösen Bindungen und Orientierungen verloren gehen, manch einer legt sie auch bewusst ab. "Verloren gehen" bedeutet hier, dass sie die Zuwanderer nicht nur in sozialen und ökonomischen, sondern auch in kulturellen und religiösen Anschauungen weitgehend der Aufnahmegesellschaft anpassen. Eine solche Assimilation bedeutet mit Blick auf die Religion Konversion, die Aufgabe der mitgebrachten religiösen Orientierung. Der Prozess kann schon in der ersten Generation, stärker jedoch in den Folgegenerationen einsetzen (Bauman 2002:6).

In the remaining part of this study the focus will be on the third type of processes of change where migration leads to conversion.

Integration and Conversion

Immigration may lead to different forms of incorporation into the new host society, from segregation and ghetto-life to an actual assimilation. As Alejandro Portes has shown in an American context, the process of incorporation and the result of this process will depend on a number of factors in the host society and with the immigrants: the policy of the host society towards various segments of immigrants (welcoming, indifferent or hostile), the attitudes towards the immigrants in the labour market (neutral, positive, discriminatory) and the characteristics of the communities of immigrants (referred to in Heisler 2000:83-84).

When I in the following talk about integration, I follow Viggo Mortensen’s definition, according to which integration is “a process which unites what was separated and thus brings about another greater entity (“sammenhæng”) which makes an increased understanding possible.” The integration of immigrants is “thus a process which should bring the immigrant into that entity (“sammenhæng”) which is called ‘Denmark’, whereby a common understanding and peaceful coexistence is made possible” (Mortensen 2002:14, my translation). Integration is a mutual process, but here we will look at that part of the process that has to do with the role of the immigrant. Integration of immigrants involve that they becomes a part of the Danish society and that they become Danish.
Such integration may lead to various processes of religious change, one of which is the conversion of immigrants. I follow Lewis R. Rambo’s understanding of conversion as “a process of religious change that takes place in dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations” (Rambo 1993:5). Conversion then may be seen as the outcome of the interactions of the longings, needs and attitudes of the convert and the characteristics of the group to which he or she converts and the specific social contest in which these processes take place. Seen from another perspective we may also describe conversion as it has been done by Brad Kallenberg, as “the emergence of new mode of life occasioned by a self-involving participation in the shared life, language, and paradigm of the believing community.” According to this understanding conversion involves a change in religious community, discourse and paradigm (Kallenberg 1995:385).

Empirical Study of Conversion and Baptism in Denmark

In order to remedy the apparent lack of data concerning conversion of adherents of other religions to Christianity in Denmark I conducted in the period from September 2004 to April 2005 an empirical study of conversion of Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus etc. to Christianity (Mogensen 2005a). The vast majority of those who were baptised were people with a migration background, either as first or second generation immigrants.

It is often very complicated to find fairly precise numbers of converts between religions, but what makes the data of converts to Christianity from other religions more readily accessible is the fact these conversions almost always take place together with baptisms, which are almost exclusively carried out by pastors, and which are registered by the churches. In a Christian understanding of conversion baptism is often seen as the decisive point in the process. At the same time membership of a church in most denominations is linked to baptism, so that baptism for converts from other religions is a condition for membership.

The study is based on a questionnaire survey, in which all 2057 pastors in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, in the following called the Folk Church (Folkekirken), the pastors or other leaders of 328 congregations from the Roman Catholic Church, the free churches and migrant congregations1 were contacted. Answers to the questionnaire were received from 68 % in the Folk Church and 67 % from the other churches. The pastors (or church leaders) were asked to inform how many people had converted from non-Christian religions and been baptised within the five year period from 2000 to 2004.2 In the questionnaire the respondents were not asked to indicate the number of baptisms of children from families where one of the parents was a Christian and the

1 In her book Andre stemmer. Migrantkirker i Danmark from 2004 the leader Tvaerkulturelt Center (Cross Cultural Centre) in Copenhagen Birthe Munck-Fairwood in cooperation with others has mapped this group of ethnic and international congregations. A migrant congregation is here understood as “a Christian congregation of at least 10 adults who regularly conduct Sunday services or similar services in a language other than Danish led by a pastor/leader who is not born in Denmark” (p. 174, my translation). The groups that were not contacted were smaller groups that were attached to the Folk Church, The Roman Catholic Church or other churches in such a way that the baptisms would be registered there. 45 of these migrant congregations were contacted and 31 answered the questionnaire.

2 Those pastors and congregational leaders who did not initially respond to the questionnaire were contacted by e-mail, letter or telephone and asked to respond. Since not all pastors or leaders have been active in their congregation during all the five years of the survey, there will be baptisms that are not reflected in this survey. Some pastors and leaders may of course not have been able to remember exactly how many baptisms of people with another religious background than Christianity they had baptised, but conversations with a number of pastors during the survey indicate that these conversions and baptisms had made such an impression on them that they most often vividly remembered the situations or were able to find the records of them.
other belonged to another religion, but many pastors in the Folk Church on their own initiative listed how many baptisms of children from such religiously mixed families they had conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baptism of people with another religious background than Christianity</th>
<th>Folk Ch. 2</th>
<th>RCC</th>
<th>Adven</th>
<th>Apost</th>
<th>Baptist</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Coven</th>
<th>Pent</th>
<th>Migrant</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religions 4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of mixed marriages 5</td>
<td>160</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table shows 660 converts from other religions were baptised in this five year period. Added to these are the baptisms of 160 children, young people and adults, who grew up in religiously mixed families.

I had expected that most baptisms would have taken place in the free churches because of their mission activities and also their more free and charismatic services and their closer fellowships, which might be more attractive to non-Western immigrants. The survey, however, shows that almost half of all baptisms of converts took place in the Folk Church, and that the majority of the rest took place in the migrant congregations.

It was also to be expected that most baptisms would have taken place in larger cities such as Copenhagen and Aarhus, because of the high number of immigrants living there. But as may be seen from the table below, those baptisms that took place in the Folk Church were relatively equally distributed among the ten dioceses, although with the highest numbers in Copenhagen and Aarhus. These baptisms are furthermore distributed among 91 of the 111 deaneries in the Folk Church, and 10 % of all pastors in this church have conducted such conversion baptisms during the five year period in question.

3 The abbreviations refer to the following churches: the Folk Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Adventist Church, the Apostolic Church, the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Covenant Church (Missionsforbundet), the Pentecostal Church and migrant congregations.

4 Other religions include adherents of Falun Gong, Confucianism, Mande religion, Mormonism, old Nordic religion, and a number of traditional Asian and African religions and a number of New Religious Movements.

5 When the non-Christian parent and the child are baptised at the same time, the baptism of the child is still registered in this category. A son or a daughter from such a religiously mixed family who does not convert to Christianity until he or she is an adult is also registered in this category. About a third of these children have a Muslim parent, most often a Muslim father. About a fourth have of them has a Buddhist parent, most often a Buddhist mother.
Baptism of people with another religious background than Christianity in the dioceses of the Folk Church 2000-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Kbh</th>
<th>Hel</th>
<th>Ros</th>
<th>L-F</th>
<th>Fyn</th>
<th>Aalb</th>
<th>Vib</th>
<th>Aarh</th>
<th>Ribe</th>
<th>Had</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religions (^7)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of mixed marriages</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>87</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously mentioned the survey is based on answers form about two thirds of all the pastors (or leaders) in the Folk Church and the other churches. Most likely the answers represent more than two thirds of the baptisms conducted by the pastors contacted in this survey, since those pastors who had been involved in baptisms of converts would probably be more motivated to participate in the survey than other pastors. If the results of the survey represent 90 % of all baptisms of converts, the total number of baptisms of converts will be 735 (excluding baptisms of children from religiously mixed marriages).

The survey covers baptisms of converts that took place in the five year period from 2000 to 2004, but also before this period Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists have converted and been baptised. The question is how many people have converted and have been baptised during the 25 year period from 1980 to 2004. Earlier in this period the number of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists in the Danish population was much smaller than in the period which was surveyed, and since also a lot of conversion research emphasise the critical importance of personal contact for conversion, it is likely that the number of conversions per year will have been significantly lower at that time. If the number of converts from these three religions to Christianity has doubled in each of the five year periods from 1980 to 2004, the total number of converts in the period 1980 – 2004 may be about 655 from a Muslim background, 302 from a Hindu background and 172 from a Buddhist background.\(^8\)

\(^{6}\) The abbreviations refer to the following dioceses: København (Copenhagen), Helsingør, Roskilde, Lolland-Falster, Fyn, Aalborg, Viborg, Aarhus, Ribe and Haderslev.

\(^{7}\) Other religions include adherents of Falun Gong, Confucianism, Mandaean religion, Mormonism, old Nordic religion, and a number of traditional Asian and African religions and a number of New Religious Movements.

\(^{8}\) If the rate of increase from one five year period to the nest only had been 50 %, then the total number of converts in the period 1980 – 2004 would have been 880 from a Muslim background, 406 from a Hindu background and 232 from a Buddhist background.
Together with the quantitative survey of baptisms of converts, another set of qualitative data was collected from the pastors in the Folk Church. The pastors who conducted the baptisms of the converts were asked to write short reports on how they perceived the circumstances around the conversions. An analysis of these data indicates that a number of dynamics are at work and that there are various patterns and processes leading to the conversion and baptism of people with another religious background than Christianity. There are Muslims, who already before they fled from Iran for various reasons wanted to leave Islam in order to become Christians, but first had the opportunity to do so when they came to Denmark. Others have had specific mystical experiences. In dreams they had seen Jesus or they felt that they in a very special way have received help from Jesus in times of crisis.

Apart from these patterns it is, however, also possible to trace a pattern that links the conversion of immigrants to Christianity closely to their integration into the Danish society. It becomes apparent in the pastors’ reports of baptisms of adults and even more in the case of baptisms of children. In a family where the mother was a Christian and the father a Muslim, the father decided that their two children should be baptised “since they lived in a Christian country.”

The same way of reasoning can also be traced in reports about baptism of children of parents who both belonged to a non-Christian religion. A pastor reports on a Hindu-family:

Many years ago the family fled from Sri Lanka to Denmark and has in a very fine way been integrated into the Danish society. Therefore the parents also thought that it was important for their children to learn something about the Danish culture and about Christianity. Consequently both of the children should follow the mini-confirmand education, and when the oldest child was to be confirmed, the parents in consultation with their children decided that their children, both the oldest son [who was to be confirmed] and his younger sister should be baptised.

A Muslim couple wanted “that their children should live as Christians in a Christian country”, and an African couple with a traditional African religious background “wanted that their child should grow up as a ‘Dane’”.

This integration-conversion pattern may be traced among both young people and adults. A pastor who baptised a young boy understood that his desire to be baptised had to do with the importance he attached to being part of the group of Danish young people and not being different from them. A young Buddhist who participated in confirmation classes wanted primarily to be baptised “in order to be in a religious fellowship with his friends”. A young Muslim man, who lived together with his Danish girlfriend, said that he would like to be baptised in order to be a real Dane and so that he could more easily get a job. For various reasons, however, he was not baptised after all.

Many of the conversions to Christianity took place in connection with a marriage between a Christian and a person with another religious background. A Hindu woman who was to be wedded to a Christian Dane wanted to be baptised together with their child because – as she explained to the pastor – “now she and her family wanted to be really Danish and therefore also Christian” (Mogensen 2005a:35-36).

There are clear indications of a special integration-conversion pattern in the current situation in Denmark. What characterises this conversion-pattern is among other things the following:
Those who covert are migrants and their children. These migrants have come to Denmark from countries with a culture very different from the one in Denmark.

Migrants and their children convert to the religion which is predominant in the culture to which they come, i.e., they convert to Christianity in the Christian dominated Danish society.

Migrants and their children convert and are baptised within the church which is the church of the vast majority and which has the status of being the official church, the Folk Church, the church of the Danish people.

The Role of Christianity and the Folk Church in the Danish Welfare Society

When immigrants with an African or Asian cultural background and with a Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist religious background are being integrated into the Danish society they will encounter a society where there is still a relatively strong link between state and church, people and church, and between culture and Christianity.

Through the Christianization of the Danes in the years or maybe rather centuries after the baptism of King Harald Bluetooth around 965 Christianity became the religious foundation of the kingdom. That this was so is evident from “Jyske lov” (Law of Jutland) from 1241, where even the first sentence states that only children who are baptised can inherit their parents. Being a citizen in the Danish kingdom and being a member of the Christian church soon became two aspects of the same matter. This situation was cemented with the reformation 1536, where the protestant church became a state church.

During the religious wars in the 16th century the principle of *cujus regio ejus religio* was adopted, and in “Danske Lov” (The Danish Law) from 1683 conversion to Catholicism (and attempts at converting Danes to Catholicism) was made a criminal offence. A Dane who chose to convert to the Catholic Church could be exiled, and Catholic missionaries who tried to convert Danes were threatened with capital punishment. While it was practically speaking impossible to convert away from the Lutheran faith and the Lutheran church, conversion the other way was allowed. With the church ritual from 1685 a baptism ritual for adults was authorised, according to which for example Jews and Muslims could be baptised and thereby gain full rights as citizens in the Danish society (Iversen 2000:72-85).

This means that for more than 600 years it was – with very few exceptions – impossible to be a Dane, in the sense of a Danish citizen, will full civil rights without at the same time being or becoming a Lutheran Christian. For non-Christians and non-Lutherans who wanted to become integrated into the Danish society the only way to follow was through conversion to the Lutheran faith and membership of the Lutheran church.

The passing of the Constitution - and as a part of this the introduction of freedom of religion – in 1849 changed this situation formally. The reality, however, was that the Lutheran Church continued to function as a state church, although it was now called the Folk Church. For the following 100 years only about a couple of percent of the population were not members of the Lutheran Church (most of them belonged to other Christian denominations), and in this way the close connection (or almost symbiosis) between the Danish people and the Lutheran Church was maintained. Many of those who decided not to be part of the Folk Church – e.g., those who converted to the Roman Catholic Church – often felt marginalised in relation to the Danish people, and some of them were
even considered to be traitors against the Danish people and the Danish culture (Mogensen 2005b:17-28).

The Constitution from 1849 stated that “The Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the Folk Church of Denmark, and as such shall be supported by the State” (par. 4), and that “The King shall be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church” (par. 6) These paragraphs are carried over into later constitutions and are also part of the present 1953 constitution. The church is still integrated into the Danish State apparatus, and this integrated status has not diminished during the latest decades. In an analysis of the close links between state and church in Denmark bishop Jan Lindhardt concludes that “when you have a state church, you also have a church state”. And he goes on to say that “we Danes find it easy to follow the word in the Bible about given Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God because in Denmark God and Caesar have the same address, namely at Christiansborg [where the parliament and the government resides]” (Lindhardt 2005:48. My translation).

In spite of the effects of the the secularisation over the last 50 years Christianity and the Folk Church are still key elements of the foundation of the Danish society. The Danish welfare model is based on a particular interpretation of Christianity and Christian ethics. It is not based on the principle of “something for something” (“noget for noget”), but on “something for nothing” (“noget for ingenting”) and on the principle of collectively taking responsibility for each other and in particular for those who cannot take care of themselves. It may be argued that the Danish welfare system is borne out of a particular Christian understanding of what it means to live together in society, and that the Christian commandment of love for your neighbour has been reduced to an idea that has been translated into a social and legal system where the citizens are forced practice a solidarity, which is a secularised version Christian love, even if they do not feel love for their fellow citizens. Along the same line the welfare state has taken over many of the diaconal task of the church and to a large extent finance (and thereby also exerts influence on) the remaining diaconal institutions of the church.

When Muslims, Hindus and Buddhist become integrated into the Danish society they cannot avoid indirectly getting in contact with Christianity, and to the extent that they acquire Danish culture they in a sense and to a certain degree will acquire elements of a Danish culture Christianity (“kulturkristendom”).

Even when the membership percentage of the folk church has fallen to 83 % and some Danes use their freedom of religion to convert to non-Christian religions, there are indications that many Danes still have a hard time imagining that it is possible to be truly Danish and to be fully integrated into the Danish society if you are not in some sense a Christian – or at least if you do not belong to a non-Christian religion. In a feature article in the Christian Daily (Kristeligt Dagblad) entitled “De fædrelandsløse” (those without a mother country) the former dean at the Cathedral in

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9 Uffe Østergaard (2003:33) argues that "No matter what Social Democratic party programs and generations of party members have said the Danish welfare stat is a result of a secularised Lutheranism in a national attire rather than a democratised socialism".

10 Jørn Henrik Petersen (2005) claims that the Danish theologian K. E. Løgstrup in many respects in the philosopher of the Danish welfare model. Logstrup transfers the ethical demand (“den etiske fordring”) from its basic location in the life world of direct face to face relationships to the collective context in society (p. 24). Petersen, however, also points out that this welfare model is under pressure these years due to secularisation since an absolute demand of solidarity with other people only may be based on an ultimate authority and therefore is dependent on a religious foundation for society (p. 32).
Odense Poul E. Andersen voices the opinion that Danish converts (from Christianity) to Islam will face serious problems in their relationship with the Danish society. “Those people who convert to Islam will have to give up essential elements of their cultural and historical identity so that they to a large extent will be people without culture and motherland in their own land” (Andersen 2000).

Leo Kamstrup, who is a dean on Amager (in Copenhagen), said in 2002 in an interview about the establishment of a mission project on Amager focusing on Muslims that Christian mission is to make Muslims into good Danes by making them into good Christians. In order to be a Dane you have to be a Christian. “I am of the opinion that we have an obligation to endeavour to make the many people here in this area who have a foreign background into Danes,” he said in a news broadcast in 2002. When confronted with the claim that his position represented cultural imperialism, he maintained that “the best way to handle part of the integration of Muslims in Denmark is by making them into Christians. Many Muslims simply cannot become a part of the Danish society, because there are all the time held back by there religion” (Sørensen 2002).

There are many indications that the Folk Church/Christianity in the integration process of immigrants from a non-Christian religious background works as a sort of a “pull & push” factor. Some immigrants feel attracted by the dominant Christian religion and the Folk Church and therefore are very inclined adapt to the Danish Christian culture and society, while others may feel that the dominant position of Christianity and the Folk church puts them under pressure to adapt in order to be accepted.

The religiously dominant position of the Folk Church in the Danish society is among other things reflected in the close cooperation between the church and the state concerning the keeping of a register of all citizens in Denmark, the coordination of the timetables of the public schools and the church’s confirmand classes, the official role of the church concerning weddings and burials and the church’s provision of “civil religion” services in connection with catastrophes and crises. Since the vast majority of the population are still members it is for all practical purposes still this church which establishes a liturgical framework around the most important events in the life of people in Denmark such as birth, transition from child to adult, marriage and burial. This being so Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus and others will quite often be in contact with the church and Christianity. A few examples from my study will be presented her.

Several pastors report that they have had positive contacts with Muslims in connection with births and the issue of birth certificates. This often leads to conversations about Christianity, and such conversations have occasionally resulted in the baptism of children as well as parents.

Mini-confirmand and confirmand classes have also attracted children with another religious background than Christianity and children from religiously mixed families. When their class mates go for these confirmand classes, which are most often coordinated with the timetable of the classes in the public school, a number of these children want to join these classes too. A pastor who had good relations with a Muslim family reported the following experience:

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11 Many politicians and representatives of the Folk Church, however, have strongly dissociated themselves from the point of view of Leo Kamstrup. The spokesman for the governing Liberal Party (Venstre) concerning church issues Birthe Rønn Hornbech appreciated that the church conducted mission among Muslims but strongly objected to making mission a tool for integration. “As Danes we are part of a people whether we are Christians, Jews or pagans. Christianity has played a key role in the history of the Danish people, but this does not mean that you have to be a Christian in order to be considered to be Danish” (Hornbech 2003).
Their adult children and grand children seem to be well integrated, and one of their youngest grand children attends confirmand classes with me together with his class mates. The family and I have a mutual respect for each other; I would certainly never make them objects of mission, and the question of baptism has never come up.

This attitude to mission is shared by many pastors in the Folk Church, but nonetheless this study has shown that what contributed to the process of conversion and to baptism for many children of immigrants has been the fact that their families had been so well integrated that it was natural for their children to attend confirmand classes together with their class mates.

Some immigrants with another religious background than Christianity come into contact with the Folk Church in connection with their attendance at funerals of Christian neighbours and friends. It seems as if a church funeral is perceived to be a meaningful ritual framework of death. Some seem to have converted to Christianity in order to make sure that they would receive a Christian funeral.

The Integration-conversion Pattern in Migrant Congregations

It is possible to find indicators of an integration-conversion pattern in relation to the folk church, but the question is whether similar dynamics are at work when immigrants and their children convert to Christianity in the context of migrant congregations. I did not collect reports on the circumstances around conversions and baptisms from pastors and other church leaders in the migrant churches, but some of the pastors in these congregations have shared their perspectives and experiences in the book “Andre stemmer. Migrantkirker i Danmark” (Other Voices. Migrant Churches in Denmark) (Birthe Munck-Fairwood 2004).

In the migrant congregations 113 former Muslims and 111 former Hindus were baptised in the period 2000-20004. Most of the converts from Islam are Farsi-speaking migrants from Iran and Afghanistan, and most of the converts from Hinduism are Tamil migrants from Sri Lanka.

John Bala, who came to Denmark as a refugee from the civil war in Sri Lanka in 1986, was a Tamil and a Hindu. His wife, who came to Denmark a couple of years later, had been raised in a Christian (Baptist) family and wanted to go to church, and John Bala decided to follow her. In 1991 he was baptised in a Baptist Church in Svendborg, where they conducted Sunday services in Tamil. He is very open about the fact that for him and the congregation there, whose pastor he is today, there is a connexion between integration and conversion.

I would like to show the Tamils that it is easier to live in Denmark when you are a Christian than when you belong to another religion. After I became a Christian I made many more Danish friends. As a Christian you are part of a big community. Our congregation works together with the Danish Baptist Church in Svendborg, and sometimes we are invited to big meetings in other places in Denmark where we meet many people – both Danes and other foreigners (Munck-Fairwood 2004:36. My translation).

According to John Bala conversion to Christianity will lead to a faster and better integration into the Danish society, and this situation can be a motivating factor for those who consider becoming Christians.
Massoud Fouroozandeh, who was raised in a Muslim family in Iran, arrived in Denmark as a 15-year-old refugee in 1985. His mother, who came to Denmark a few years later, came into contact with a Pentecostal Church and decided to convert to Christianity. Through her and the Christian fellowship to which she belonged, he encountered Christianity and in 1996 he was also baptised in the Pentecostal Church in Odense. Today he is the pastor in charge of “Mohabat - Church of Love”, which is a Farsi-speaking church with congregations in different parts of Denmark, and whose members almost all of them are coverts from Islam. Fouroozandeh emphasises that it is important that new congregations do not isolate themselves from others. Personally, I make a great effort to establish contacts between Iranian congregations, for which I am responsible, and the Folk Church, the free churches, and Christian organisations. The church has a great task concerning integration of people who convert to Christianity. When people decide to leave their own [pre-migration] religion, they are more flexible and ready to learn more about the Danish culture. Christianity represents a part of the Danish values. Therefore, people who convert to Christianity from another religion have already gone a long way in the process of integration (Munck-Fairwood 2004:54. My translation).

For Fouroozandeh, Christianity represents some of the Danish values, and consequently for him there is a close connection between becoming a Christian and becoming Danish. In his autobiography, he elaborates on this perspective.

The most important thing is to teach immigrants about the new culture to which they have come and the Danish constitution which is based on Christian values. If you can understand the Christian cultural heritage, it is ten times easier to be integrated into the Danish society, but if the foreigners just sit quietly in the pews without understanding anything, they have made no progress (Fouroozandeh & Øhrstrøm 2005:247. My translation).

That these conversions take in an ethnic congregation, is here seen as an advantage for the integration since the convert in this way will have a better opportunity to understand and acquire the Danish values in a language which they are completely familiar. Therefore, Fouroozandeh can conclude that “the best way you can integrate immigrants in Denmark is by telling them about Jesus even if it in the beginning takes place in their own language” (ibid).

Ravi Chandran, who is from Singapore and has lived in Denmark since 1993, was raised as a Hindu but converted to Christianity before he came to Denmark and is now the pastor of a multi-ethnic congregation in Copenhagen, “International Christian Community” which he established in 2002. Ravi Chandran elaborates on the integration strategy which Fouroozandeh indicated.

Migrant congregations are good at confirming the ethnic identity and self-esteem of new Danes [i.e., immigrants]. Here people get an experience of still being who they once were. It gives them continuity and coherence and promotes psychological stability. Migrant congregations bring new Danes together in a social fellowship which does not exclusively take place on the terms of the Danes.

When immigrants convert to Christianity in migrant congregations, their ethnic identity is confirmed so that they do not lose their relationship with their history, culture and people, and at the same time
through the Christian faith they establish bonds in terms of values with the Danish society and significant relations with the indigenous Danes.

Social Dimensions in Conversion

What integration and conversion have in common is that they are both processes with significant social dimensions. Both processes lead to incorporation of the persons who are converting or are being integrated into a community or a group or another social entity.

In his study of conversion to Judaism in Copenhagen the anthropologist Andrew Buckser observes that conversion studies not so often focus on “conversion as a social event”. “Conversion to a religion is an irreducibly social act: one does not merely join a faith, but one enters into a set of new relationships with members of a religious community” (Buckser 2003:69). The social dimension in a conversion may be so dominant that it may in some cases be a “purely social conversion”

Membership in a religious community derives from more than a set of beliefs; it also involves a set of relationships with other members, a set of practices and habits, and a set of aesthetic orientations and discursive styles… Converts are able to assimilate such elements without the corresponding beliefs, and indeed these elements may provide a better index of a person’s conversion (Buckser 2003:81).

There are indications that for some immigrants who have converted to Christianity the social dimension has been so dominant that what we see is an almost “purely social conversion” without much reference to other aspects of the Christian faith. In other cases, however, the social dimension seems to have been one factor alongside a number of other factors.

In all religions fellowships or communities play a central role in the life of the adherents. All religious traditions require specific fellowships in order that new and old adherents of the religions over time may experience that the religions are plausible and credible. Therefore the old Catholic maxime still holds true, that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, i.e, outside the church – here understood broadly as the religious fellowship or community – there is no salvation – here understood as the experience that the religion and what the religion promises are still probable and credible. Without relations and interactions with people with the same faith or religion it will in the long run be very difficult for a religious person to hold his or her religion for true and real and thereby maintain his or her new identity. Religious fellowships or communities are, as the sociologist of religion Peter Berger has drawn attention to a kind of a “plausibility structure” for the adherents of the religions (Berger 1974:55). With reference to Saul from Tarsus Peter Berger and his colleague Thomas Luckmann conclude that the phase of incorporation is the most difficult in all the conversion process.

Saul may have become Paul in the aloneness of religious ecstasy, but he could remain Paul only in the context of the Christian community that recognized him as such and confirmed the ‘new being’ in which he located this identity (Berger & Luckmann 1966:145).

The religious fellowship is thus the indispensable “plausibility structure” which helps the convert to take his conversion experience seriously and maintain a sense of the plausibility and credibility of his or her new faith.
When Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists leave their homeland, their town or village, and their local religious community and settle in Denmark, they are uprooted from the plausibility structure which nurtured their faith in their home country. If they do not find an equivalent community, which may nurture their faith, there is a greater possibility that they may go through a de-conversion from their pre-migration religion and perhaps also a conversion to another religion.

The immigrants enter a Danish society, which on a national and on a local level may be seen as a “plausibility structure” that tends to make a number of “Danish” assumptions and ideas, values and attitudes plausible for the citizens in this society. Even though secularization for many decades have impacted the Danish society and its citizens so that the church and Christian faith no longer have the same strong position as previously, then still Christianity – often in the form of a more subdued culture Christianity (kulturkristendom) and a view of man and society, which is related to the Christian tradition - is an essential part of common understanding of what is implied in being Danish. Therefore the integration of immigrants into the Danish society – apart from their attitudes and desires – may push or draw them in the direction of Christianity.

Lewis Rambo refers to the following phases or dimensions in the conversion process: context, crisis, encounter, interaction, engagement and consequences. Of special interest in this context is the phase or dimension of interaction. Rambo describes this as an establishment of a sphere of influence where four different forms of interactions are at work:

- Relations – With whom does the convert interact?
- Rituals – Which unique religious activities does the convert carry out?
- Rhetoric – How does the convert begin to think and talk differently?
- Roles – Which behavior does the convert do in consonance with the expectations which are directed to converts? The change of role is an internalization and integration of the changes in relations, rhetoric and rituals and will provide the convert with a new life style, new faith concepts and new networks of relationships (Rambo 1993:123).

When migrants with a Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist background engage in such an interaction with church/Christianity and thereby become members of the church of the majority or another church that also is related to the religion of the majority and thus adopts the religion of the majority – through relations, rituals, rhetoric and roles – the process of religious conversion comes close to the process of social integration whereby the convert’s membership of the Danish society and his or her Danish identity are strengthened.

It may also be argued that the social integration into the Danish society due to the Christian or culture Christian character of the society, may occasionally lead to a “religious integration” into the church of this society, i.e., a religious conversion. Finally, it may be argued that a religious conversion to the dominant religion of the society may further a social integration into the society. The relationship between conversion and integration can thus take a variety of forms

- Integration as a motive for conversion.
- Conversion as a means for or a condition for integration.
- Conversion as an effect of integration.
- Conversion as the religious expression of integration.

Conversion of migrants to Christianity in the Folk Church or in the migrant churches may for some of the converts best be explained with reference to the integration-conversion patterns outlined above. It does not make a very big difference whether it was the social integration which brought
the converts in contact with church and Christianity and thereby led to the conversion and baptism of these migrants. Or whether the migrants consciously have desired to convert and be baptized in order to be most effectively integrated into the Danish society and to be recognized to be truly Danish. In both cases the religious conversion process is dynamically connected with the social integration process. All this does not go to say that these patterns apply to all immigrants. There are, as mentioned above, also other significant conversions patterns at work in the conversion of immigrants in the Danish society (Mogensen 2003)
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