

SAVED TO SERVE: SALVIFIC ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN DISCIPLING MUSLIM CONVERTS FOR SOUND CHURCH INTEGRATION

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Abstract

This paper is an exposition of the salvific role of Christian education in discipling Muslim converts for sound church integration. This is done by considering the responsibility of the great commission to disciple and the fact that Muslim converts need special attention in terms of discipleship for proper and sound church integration, which helps them become stable Christians. This situation is particular to but not limited to churches in North-East Nigeria. To achieve this, the writer employed the descriptive method for the study. Findings revealed that the role of Christian education is paramount to the physical and spiritual growth of Muslim converts and to integrate them into the church through engaging discipleship, which consists of the practical and biblical orientation of love, service, worship, proclamation, and advocacy, which are the tasks of Christian education according to Pazmino. This writer concludes that discipleship is a responsibility following salvation of individuals and groups to enhance the belief of Muslim converts. Moreover, there is no other option than for Christian educators in the church to care and teach with relevant resources considering the situation and the understanding of the Muslim converts who see the church as a community where they can love and be loved. This writer hereby recommends that churches in this changing world should be prepared for Muslims who will come to Jesus Christ and not wait until they come before thinking of what to do.

Keywords: *Salvation, Christian Education, Muslim Converts, Church Integration.*

Introduction:

The delivery of the “Great Commission” in this changing world involves tasks such as preaching, evangelizing, teaching, that need to be carried out with workable and practical strategy. The Covid 19 pandemic lock-down and the resolve to the internet has made the message of Jesus Christ to spread more than before and internet survey shows Muslims are coming to Jesus through the truth of the gospel shared with them on the internet through different ministries. Hence, churches must be ready to disciple them during this as it is their salvific role of Christians. The call of a Christian is the call to yield to Jesus Christ's commandment and to fulfil it with all sense of passion and love which is demonstrated through service. The purpose of this is to be an agent of reconciliation between men and God so as to expand the kingdom of God and depopulate the kingdom of darkness.

Moreover, Christian evangelization has reached Muslims everywhere with outstanding successes recorded, even Muslim scholars agreed (David Wood, 2020). The *raison d'être* of evangelization to Muslims as a sign of Christian way of reproduction cannot be gainsaid. It is one thing to evangelize and another thing is to nurture. It is imperative that Christian education which is dedicated to nurture becomes more committed to delivering the task in this changing world. The level at which converts are abandoned after large crusades and revivals expecting them to grow for themselves is alarming, leaving them open to unknown and great danger which lack of follow up or discipleship make them return back to where they were coming from because there was nothing else to hold unto.

Therefore, the thinkable reason for this easy neglect is lack of preplanned strategy for nurture or follow up before evangelizing. Moreover, the trooping out of new converts to Christ catch many evangelists unawares. It is based on this premise that this study is embarked upon. From this researchers' experience, many churches that are into Muslim evangelism lack good follow-up plans to welcome and nurture Muslim converts to get consistently matured spiritually so as to be strong in their new faith and understand Christ from a Christian perspective. In carrying

out this assignment, the arm of the church responsible for teaching and nurturing is to dive into serious work of specialized ministry for Muslim converts as there is an engagement in formulating new programs in helping these ones grow appropriately to do the work of the church through effective and efficient discipleship because it is the salvific role of Christians. This descriptive study will therefore; explain the dynamics of Christian education, describe the experience of Muslim converts, explain what church integration means and expound the role of Christian education in discipling Muslim converts.

The Dynamics of Christian Education

The knowledge of Christian education consists of about five dynamics. One of the dynamics of Christian education is the understanding through definition. Pazmino (2008, 23) leaned on the work of his former professor at Columbia University, Lawrence Cremin in order to define Christian education. Cremin defined education broadly as “the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any learning that results from that effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended.” Therefore, Mambo, quoting Pazmino thus defines Christian education as the;

Deliberate systematic, and sustained divine and human effort to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith. It fosters the change, renewal, and reformation of persons, groups, and structures by the power of the Holy Spirit to conform to the revealed will of God as expressed in the Old and New Testaments and preeminently in the person of Jesus Christ, as well as any outcomes of that effort (Mambo 2018, 8).

This is one of the most satisfying formulated definitions. In effect, then, Christian education is the work of the church, the Christian home, the Christian school, and Christians in whatever societal setting they find themselves. In addition, Ishola and Abegunde opined that there is no possibility of education unless there is availability of the truth of the Bible because man as God’s creature relies on God who is all-knowing to learn new things (2018, 103). Intentionality is paramount to Christian education. It involves the effort to share biblical content, to grapple with

its implications for life, and to suggest avenues for appropriate response (Pazmino 2008, 24). Ishola and Abegunde upon Obaje's opinion defined Christian education as "the holistic training of believers in Christ Jesus and the human society at large on the principles of Christian faith as stated in the Holy Scriptures" (2018, 103).

The second dynamic is understanding the relationship between Christian education and theology. Gangel opined that Christian education must avoid teaching Bible and theology as ends in themselves, reducing them to purely cognitive constructs. Rather, studies must be designed so that students learn to think in biblical ways, using theology as a guide to categories of thinking (1991, 14). Therefore, theology, rather than educational philosophy, must control Christian education.

The third dynamic in this paper is to understand the aim of Christian education which is transformation that is actualized most naturally within the context of community through the help of the Holy Spirit. Both the Old and New Testaments put particular stress on the interactive, interpersonal aspects that provide reaching and learning situations that transform beliefs, attitudes, values, and behavior patterns (Deut. 6:1-9; 11:18-21; Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:15-16; Heb. 10:24-25.). Moreover, transformation of lives is the sole purpose of Christian education. The purpose of education in the Old Testament was to lead person to holiness and transformation (Pazmino 2008, 136). The law was intended to expose to sin. It also demands holiness and righteousness, being based on the holiness of God (Lev. 11:44-45). The law was the central core of Jewish education. The Torah was meant to reveal God's demands of expectation for persons. People were to be trained in the ways of God and the focus was godly character. Likewise, in the New Testament, the overall goal of Christian education is to help all persons believe and mature in the Christian faith (Ayandokun 2013, 9).

Christian education is meant to introduce persons of all ages to the Christian faith for the purpose of Christian conversion. The educational ministry of a church is both mental and moral, both mind and character. Christian education focuses on spiritual development, life-changing, and transformation. The Christian education is expected to touch lives of the people in the church and

within the community. People need to make themselves available for the transforming power of God in Christ Jesus through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit (Ayandokun, 9).

The fourth dynamic of Christian education is the strategy which is discipleship with the understanding of its nature considering the disciples and the disciplers. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19 that His disciples as they are going, should make disciples. The word disciple literally from the Greek word *mathetes* means a pupil, apprentice, or adherent. It may safely be assumed that Christ wanted his followers to produce disciples, not of themselves, but of Christ (Nihinlola 2016, 123). The verb form *matheteuo* means to be or become a pupil or a disciple (Adejuwon 2016, 53). The unity of the body of Christ is found when each member of the church seeks to tune his or her life to Jesus Christ. Therefore, nurturing to maturity is important. And since a man's maturity is linked to his productivity, a Christian's maturity is also linked to being productive evangelistically. The fulfillment of the Great Commission is dependent on human intervention (Woodruff, 2020, 5) because God largely has chosen to place his work in the hands of humanity. Members of the church have become his body with Christian lips as His means of communication. This means therefore that those who have been disciplined should become disciplers.

Discipleship is about giving oneself– losing oneself in the purposes of God every day. But in giving and losing, one gains and finds oneself in God. A genuine call to discipleship is an invitation to a life of discipline. In every century that men have followed Christ – from Paul to Martin Luther, from Francis of Assisi to Albert Schweitzer – discipline has been a significant aspect of true Christian living. The life of discipline demanded by Christian discipleship does not restrict and petrify the disciples; it liberates them (Bonhoefer 1963, 40). Christian discipleship is all about disciplining oneself until one can give the best of which he is capable in serving God and man in the name and Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is about discipline which denies self so that self can relate qualitatively to God and to neighbor. Christian discipleship is about an assurance that God in Christ moves with us in history, transforming life from treadmill or saga into pilgrimage. In Christian discipleship, despite the knowledge of good of the individual, he would discover the *summum benum* - the power for good and happiness through longing and conforming to the image of Christ (Israel & Lindo 1842, 20).

The last dynamic of Christian education is the result which is spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is more than the transfer of knowledge from a teacher to a learner, it is a process concerned with the holistic growth and development of the individual (Theron 2004). Whereas the goal of education is learning, the goal of spiritual formation is maturity (Palmu 2019, 7). The biblical word translated “mature, perfect, complete” is the word *teleios*. In Matthew 5:48, Christians are exhorted, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” William Barclay makes the comment that “the basic meaning of *teleios* in the New Testament is always that the thing or person so described fully carries out the purpose for which it was designed (2003, 1956).

Moreover, formation is from the root word *morphe* (Rom. 12:3; 2 Cor. 3:18), from which the word metamorphosis is derived. It concerns not only outward change but also a crucial development from one form to another. As Scripture describes it, we are being transformed into his likeness. The first concern is with being. Naidoo, M. quoting Lamoureux’s review asserts that spiritual formation includes: conversion of mind and heart, fostering integrative thinking, character formation, promoting authentic discipleship, personal appropriation of faith and knowledge and cultivating a spirituality of the intellectual life (2008, 131). Therefore, Spiritual formation is the hub of authentic discipleship. Everyone must understand that spiritual formation is not “postconversion maintenance.” It is an ongoing path of developmental learning experience. It gives structure and form to the maturity process. While spiritual growth can in no way be standardized and forced, it can be given direction. Spiritual formation is a dynamic process focused on developing through similar phases of growth, healing and renewal (Taylor 2001, 91).

The pathway to becoming like Jesus Christ in discipleship entails some works on the part of the disciple. Prominent among such process is self-discipline. Dallas Willard in Taylor (2001, 96) explains the coworking of God’s grace and human action; True character transformation begins in the pure grace of God and is continually assisted by it. But action is also indispensable in making the Christian truly a different kind of person – one having a new life in which, as 2 Corinthians 5:17 states, “Old things have passed away and, behold, all things become new.” Failure to act in certain definite ways will guarantee that this transformation does not come to pass.” Richard Foster

(2018, np) proposed three categories of Spiritual discipline; The inward disciplines: meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. The Outward Disciplines: simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. The Corporate Disciplines: confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

Muslim Converts' Experience and Church Integration

Muslims are people who are adherents of the Islam (Olopade, 2018, 47) and Islam is etymologically from Arabic 'islām meaning 'submission', from 'aslama meaning 'submit (to God)'. "Islam" in its literal sense thus means "submission," "surrender" or "giving up." This is different from "Salam" سلام which means "well-being/peace" (WikiIslam, 2021). Many Muslims converts face harassment, hatred, marginalisation, intimidation and violence. They have no real voice in public media, have hardly any access to government positions for employment and are barely represented in local politics especially in a Muslim majority nation (World Watch Monitor, 2018). Young Christians feel discrimination at school also (World Watch Monitor, 2016).

Churches in the north are growing as Muslims convert to Christianity because many Muslims claim they have dreams of Jesus. Many Muslims become Christians, and live with the fear of being killed or pressured by fellow Muslims (Enwerem 2013, 150). Even when their family members or the Muslim community carry out this persecution, there is always no response from those with higher political power, such as Nigeria's government including the ward, local government, state and federal representatives. Some go back but those who are choosing to stay are experiencing a renewed fervour in their faith (Idris 2018, 4).

The Muslim converts experience violence and great pressure to abandon their new faith like an Ex-Muslim girl was imprisoned for converting to Christianity on January 22, 2018. They are disowned and worse things happen (Hardy, 2003, 31). A woman or man who abandons the Islamic faith is called an 'apostate'. And if a man or a woman apostate from Islam, he or she will be given a chance to deny their conversion, say to Christianity for one month according to Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) and Abu Ḥanīfa (d. 767) (Brown, 2017). If they deny, the case is closed. If they insist to embrace Christianity, they will be executed, because leaving Islam is not just a religious but cultural conversion (Cooper & Maxwell, 2003, 159).

Until the late 19th century, the vast majority of Islamic scholars in Madh'hab (Sunni) and Imamah (Shia) schools of jurisprudence held that for adult men, apostasy from Islam was a crime as well as a sin, an act of treason punishable with the death penalty, typically after a waiting period to allow the apostate time to repent and to return to Islam (Parshal, 2002, 107). These hadiths (tradition) support their claim:

Allah's Apostle said, "The blood of a Muslim who confesses that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that I am His Apostle, cannot be shed except in three cases: In Qisas for murder, a married person who commits illegal sexual intercourse and the one who reverts from Islam (apostate) and leaves the Muslims." (Sahih al-Bukhari, 9:83:17, Sunan Abu Dawood, 38:4339). The marriage becomes invalid with *riddah* (apostasy). However, if the *murtad* (apostate) returns to Islam and if both parties want to continue their marriage, a new marriage ceremony and *mahr* are not in question. Hanafis regard divorce due to *riddah* as *talaq bain* (irrevocable divorce). The *murtad* cannot be an heir to his Muslim relatives; when he dies, his Muslim relatives cannot be heirs to him either: "A Muslim cannot be the heir of an unbeliever, nor can an unbeliever be the heir of a Muslim" (Bukhari, Faraid, 26; Muslim, Faraid, 1) (Mulla 1976, 279).

There is trouble in much of the Muslim world according to Nathan Brown, an expert on Islamic law at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Beehner (2007). The problem did not just start according to Safa, F. Reza (1996, 47) but has been from the time of Hijra, when Muhammad and his followers emigrated to Medina in AD 622, up to this moment, terror and fear have been the strategy of Islam. Brown further states that that religious conversion does not just define one's personal beliefs but also one's legal category. Even a Muslim group called The Southern Nigeria Al-Hikma Generation based in Ibadan are ready to make apostates suffer under law by the total implementation of Sharia in the Southwest and all over Nigeria (The Guardian, February 2, 2015). This is because apostasy is taken to be socially breaking one's bond with the community and betraying one for another" (Beehner 2007). The Editor of Guardian Newspapers in 2020 bemoaned the helpless situation and acts of Muslim extremists against Muslim converts

in Southwest Nigeria. He states that “Despite in South West of Yoruba ethnic group Nigeria where there Muslims and Christian share majority but there are extremists even within the family who would not mind harming any of their member who decides to convert to some other religion. Many of Muslim in South West believe that Interreligious conversion between them amounts to a case of extreme religious apostasy” (Guardian Newspapers, 2020). The Editor stated that some Muslims “perceive new converts from Christianity as “unreliable members” of the Muslim community.” During investigation in Oyo state, Ogun state, Ekiti state and Ondo state, some women told them that they are facing harms and had been attacked on multiple occasions by not only family members but also religious extremists fired up and sponsored by Islamic clerics. The Muslim converts interviewed said the Islamic clerics had planted a seed of hatred and encourage Muslims to discourage every member of their family and no family members must convert to Christianity. Also, according to them, some Islamic clerics encourage intolerance of conversion of Muslims to Christianity (Guardian Newspapers, 2020).

In the words of one of the Muslim converts in Southwest Nigeria according to Guardian Newspapers (2020);

The consequences for an Islam converting to Christianity is usually severe, the new convert is most often than none treated like an outcast, treated with disdain, with so much bitterness, hatred and contempt. He/she faces being ostracized and banished, worst-case scenario, the individual is maimed, brutalized or killed. The thought of being subjected to this ill-treatment and punishment, makes people ever imagine converting from Islam to Christianity.

Therefore, considering all the Muslim background believers experience, the church must prepare for a sound integration that will build the confidence of the Muslims coming to Jesus Christ through discipleship as it will be explained in this paper. The word ‘Church’ is from the Greek *ekklesia* and may be used to refer to the saints and sanctified, the believers and the faithful, the people of God, the body of Christ or a community of believers in Christ who are inhabitants in a particular area (Ayo-Obiremi 2019, 296). Integration in the language of the church is the process

of establishing a new member in the faith and in the fellowship of other believers in a local church. It is connecting newcomers and new members with the life of the church (Makori 2014, 25).

Role of Christian Education in Discipling Muslim Converts

Christian education has vital roles to play in integrating Muslim converts through discipleship that is intentional and Holy Spirit inspired and directed. Dr. E. V. Hill’s use of the integrative model in Pazmino, which is the image of a softball or baseball diamond to suggest the tasks of the Christian church and particularly Christian education is adapted for strategic Muslim converts discipleship in this paper. This would make it strategic and have positive result. These tasks according to Pazmino have direct implications for the purposes of Christian education. The figure below represents the task of Christian education.

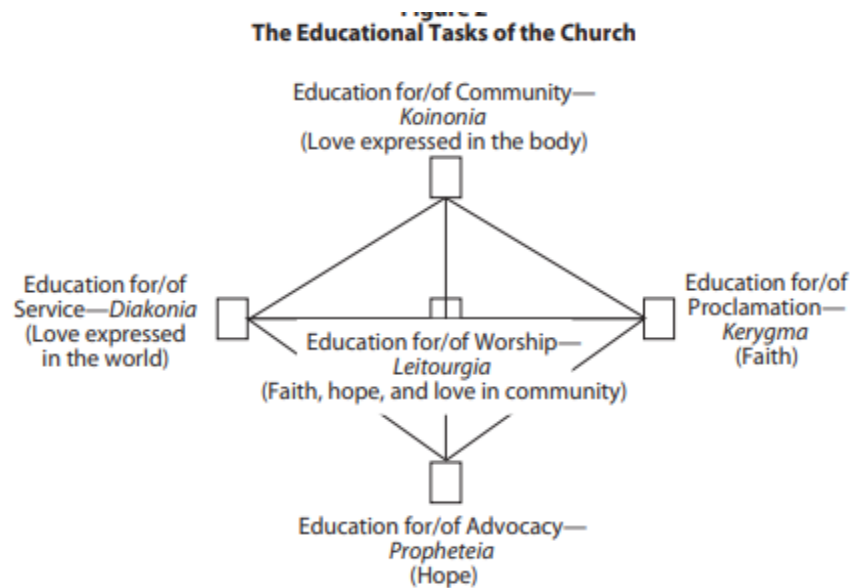


Figure 1: A Diagram showing the Educational Task of the Church according to Hill. (Pazmino 2008, 46)

These tasks are explained below:

Expression of Love (Education for/or Community- *Koinonia*):

The role of Christian education in discipling Muslim converts is to create an atmosphere of love and acceptance for the person coming into the church. Christian educators should educate

members about what the member's reaction should be to the Muslim converts. This is due to the fact that some of them did not grow up in an atmosphere where love is expressed either from father to mother or parents to children. They even understand that they might be killed eventually because of the hatred for apostates even as they lose many things that are important to their lives. An example is Abu Da'ud who was disowned and disinherited because he followed Jesus as his Lord and Savior (Abu Da'ud, 2019). A Muslim convert by the name Oyeyemi Adigun shared her experience with this writer that the love shown by a Baptist Pastor and the Baptist Church when she gave her life to Jesus in 2008 in fear of family members who catered for her and threatened her made her become stable in the Christian faith. Creating a community that expresses love every moment is necessary for the convert's listening ears. Many Muslims do not believe that God loves them or God is inside them because to them, God is remote and cannot be a father of anyone. Therefore, the content of any discipleship material before any other thing must be an emphasis on love and forgiveness.

Though the convert had listened to a sermon and given his or her life to Jesus Christ, it is imperative that such individual is taught more about the love for God and especially the love for everyone notwithstanding the religion, race, colour and clan and most importantly make such teachings practical in the community of faith so that the acts would not contradict the words. The suitable ways of starting a discipleship are making friends with the Muslim convert, visiting them and organizing prayers with them. Lausanne Occasional (Paper No. 49, 2004) emphasized that "it is a specific calling to care for new believers from a Muslim background." Members further asserted that, "the church must be committed to long-term, painstaking and person-centered approach to caring for Muslim Background Believers."

The Task of Service to Others (Education for/of Service- *Diakonia*)

Discipling Muslim converts takes into cognizance training for self-discovery for a perfect church integration. The Muslim convert should be given an orientation that Christians are trained to serve. This does not mean that they should be made to join the working force of the church but to make them become aware that people have different ministries that can motivate others to love God the more and can also render a helping hand to others. Their discipleship material should help

them to understand what living as a Christian entail especially in terms of doing ministry. Such people should not be left alone to navigate on their own but the Christian education arm of the church must teach ways in which the converts can serve in the church or render helping hands to others. The converts should be made to understand that all they have is for the edification of the church and there are blessings available for people who serve in love and not to please man (Roderick B., 2018).

The Task of Worship (Education for/of worship – *leitourgia*)

In performing the very role, Christian education should provide the avenue for Muslim converts to understand what worship entails. Certain principles of faith must be taught and practiced by Christian educators of the church. They should emphasize the hope Christians have in Jesus Christ and what worship entails as Christians. The Muslim from childhood had been taught different rituals in prayer and therefore should learn the principles of Christian worship, that is, individual and congregational worship. The people handling the discipleship should be able to answer certain Muslim objections about Christian worship like answering to the statement of “Christians do not follow biblical forms of worship,” “the nature of God as being triune,” “Jesus is not the son of God” and other counter-statements from Muslim apologists.

In corroborating inductive teaching, Paulus in Janelle (2017) opines that “Discipleship is the very first and most significant step in following Jesus, you can’t expect a new believer to understand the Bible without proper guidance. Chances are they will get confused, or worse, mislead themselves because of self-interpretation.” The people who would disciple Muslim converts should be people who are specially trained for it so that they can answer several questions that would be raised and not those who cause more confusion. The Muslim converts should be prepared for uninterrupted and soul lifting worship. They should understand their Creator and why He died on the cross for the sin man for total redemption from discipleship handlers

The Task of Proclamation (Education for/of Proclamation – *Kerygma*)

It is important to know that frustration can set in for a Muslim convert that may shake them and also threaten their lives (Osindo, 2016, 222). Proclamation with the use of Scriptures that they need to memorize preferably in their mother tongue would help them stand in faith and have a firm

foundation. In disciplining Muslim converts, people involved should take cognizance of the Bible texts they encounter. The discipleship material should proclaim God's purpose for their lives with key texts that will make them strong even when passing through hard times. They should be prepared through the scripture for the time of persecution and how to take it with joy. The discipleship manual should include many who have passed through same stage with corresponding Biblical references (Lateju 2002, 44). Example of such materials is *Muslim Seeker Bible Study and MBB Bible Studies* and *Discipling Muslim Background Believers* (Da'ud, 2019). It gives them the confidence that the Lord is with them and they will be victorious too over circumstances that may come their ways. It is good that there are positive confessions based on the scriptures to help them become strong especially when they cannot read. Believers from Muslim Background (BMB) must also be "made fully aware at baptism that they are joining a worldwide body of Christians" (Osindo 2016, 230).

The Task of Advocacy (Education for/of Advocacy – *Propheteia*)

Another role of Christian education in discipling Muslim converts is making them know that God is interested in them and their expectations will never be cut short. The task of advocacy must be carried out. The message of hope must be given to encourage them in the face of the oppression they experience from the outside world. And for those who are free, maybe from a non-conservative Muslim home, they need to know with emphasis that there is hope for a greater tomorrow and also an assurance that heaven is sure (Kienel 195). They should be taught the principle and practice of prayer and disciplines which can help one to become strong spiritually and follow Jesus Christ with one's whole heart. The hope should also be built in them that other Muslims can be saved by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This paper had addressed the salvific role of Christian education in discipling Muslim converts or Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) for sound church integration in a changing world through explaining the dynamics of Christian education, describing the experience of Muslim converts, explaining what church integration means and explaining the role of Christian education in discipling Muslim converts. The commitment of practicing churches shows that discipleship

training helps in raising vibrant leaders and enhances deeper exposure into the word of God as a new convert. The discipleship programme helps Muslim converts to develop the church. Undergoing discipleship training is a necessity for Christians to abide in Christ, therefore, church leaders should have designed special discipleship programme for Muslim converts in their local churches for effective physical and spiritual growth. Discipleship training is a necessity because proper discipleship helps practical Christianity. However, all arms of the church should be made to become involved. This writer recommends that churches should train members who would evangelize Muslims and also strategically work to integrate them through discipleship into the church so that they will not become strange in their new community.

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