

## Editorial

By CMW

Welcome to the first of what is hoped to be many When Women Speak 'webzines'. It is my joy to have been invited to provide the first editorial: it has given me the privilege of having already read the engaging collection of articles you will find in the webzine, and of interacting with the godly, dedicated women who have prepared them. Now I find myself giving thought to you who will be reading and reflecting on the articles. I am assuming that most readers are sisters in Christ ministering in majority Muslim contexts, with friends born into Muslim families, or certainly dedicated disciples of Christ desirous of bringing others into the circle of His love. I join those who have written the articles in praying that what you find here will enrich you and the ministries you are involved in.

The profile of our readership alone provides adequate grounds for taking 'Discipleship' as the topic of this first webzine. We each desire to fulfil the mandate (2Timothy 2:2) to be good disciples who enable others to become disciples who disciple others, not least because we are aware that in initiating His ministry Our Lord Jesus majored on gathering to himself a group of disciples who were later commissioned to disciple others. However, whilst that core principle is straight-forward we also share in the common knowledge that for most of the last 1400 years effective discipleship in Muslim contexts has been limited: even where individuals have come to faith there has been little replication and no obvious wide-scale transformation of communities. It is a cause of rejoicing that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen unprecedented numbers of BMBs becoming followers of Jesus, and that not only do the statistics include women but they are accompanied by anecdotes of bold Spirit inspired initiatives of women that are bearing fruit. Yet even so, there remains much to be done, and wisdom needed, to overcome all kinds of challenges in order for there to be 'fruit that will last'.

Each of the webzine articles identifies such challenges and makes proposals about how to respond in a distinct way. The articles are not in competition, but in their differences remind us that both the discipler and the disciple are unique individuals. Indeed, 'The Glorious Messiness of Discipleship' has in view the quirky unpredictability which is a part of working with individuals whatever their culture. It invites us to consider when the process of discipleship begins: it provokes me to consider whether there is a sense in which all encounters, or at least ongoing-relationships, are in some way moments of 'discipling'. It also brings into view tricky questions of when and how we might know if someone is in Christ when their culture is antagonistic to a declaration of faith in Jesus, providing practical proposals about how we, as disciplers, should walk alongside amidst the uncertainties.

Frequently differences between discipler and disciple, in the contexts we have in view, are because they originally come from very different cultural backgrounds. Arguably the 'great leap forward' in the birthing of BMB movements has come as mission workers intentionally

contextualized their approaches to witnessing and discipling. Whilst some of the terms and ideas continue to be contested (eg., articles by Travis et al and by Tennent in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23:3, 2006) there is a general consensus that even as the discipler is the means of inducting someone (or group) into new ways of understanding and living, principles of communication require ideas to be expressed through forms and language that are meaningful to the disciple(s). In the context of Islam and Muslim community there are also pragmatic reasons for taking on cultural forms and practices, to enable BMBs to remain and ultimately become transformative disciplers amongst their own people. Accordingly, all our articles touch on issues of contextualisation in some way, however 'Patronage and Reciprocity' (a *tour-de-force* in its review of current discussion around the subject of Honour-Shame culture, individual identity and mission practice) and 'Sufi Women Saints: a paradigm for discipleship?' engage those issues directly. Both articles are prodding us to make changes in our approaches, and perhaps even re-work ways we think about our own faith or what we require of others. Both also take up the gendered perspectives of the issues they address. Aspects of the discussion on Honour-Shame, which is defined as a 'moral framework for social relationships', inform understanding of how those of us ministering as foreign women in the culture of the other might be (mis)understood. It can also give clues about how to engage meaningfully with our host society, and be a vehicle for explaining the Gospel. Nevertheless the article primarily sets out to show that having Honour-Shame as a framework of thought provides an ideal foundation for committed discipleship, and that, probably for all, but certainly for women, this discipleship should be grounded within 'the nurture of relationships'. Whilst the approach takes community values as its key, it is also shaped by respect and care for the fragility and importance of the identity of the disciple.

The question as to whether Sufi women saints provide a paradigm for discipleship explores a different aspect of the Islamic heritage of some. Like the Honour-Shame article this one also identifies elements within the experience of at least some Muslim women as exemplary. It introduces us to some great women from the past that have had significant impact both within Islam and beyond. In doing so it challenges stereotypes of the interests, capabilities and potential for spiritual influence present in the lives of Muslim women and which are constrained by misogyny but also by the unwitting presumptions of the discipler. The article gives opportunity to become more familiar with Muslim women who are concerned with the interior life, and to be more ready to recognise signs around us which indicate the pursuit of a more spiritual, rather than institutional, religion. Drawing on long and rich experience in Bangladesh, the author muses on discoveries and passes on insights to suggest how to empower women disciples to fulfil their spiritual vocations within Muslim background *Jamaat*.

The final article, 'Grace Environments', returns to addressing questions of how one individual disciplines another. Sitting as background to the reflection on a genuinely grace-filled experience are the realities of a minority church which is reluctant to invest in a BMB

and old patterns of missionary engagement which were reluctant to encourage close relationships between foreign workers and local individuals. 'Grace Environments' brings together testimony, and discerning reflection that draws on contemporary Christian writing on mentoring, to draw our attention afresh to biblical ways to be nurturing future leaders. This is not about workbooks and training manuals, but about the often ordinary, sometimes costly, 'sharing of our very selves' (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Yet, even as the article will be appreciated by individuals involved in discipling, its frank observations and constructive suggestions have important implications for agencies and those involved in the preparation of mission workers too.

All in all then, the articles are a rich mix of material around the single topic of discipleship. They are dealing with the real stuff of life and ministry: of the wonderful quiriness of every individual made in the image of God, of the significance of 'when and where' ministry is taking place, of the relationship of a woman's identity to the community in which 'she lives and moves and has her being', of the ways hesitancy and reluctance within Christian communities has played its role in a stunted development of disciples in Islamic contexts, of false stereotypes and fantastic potential of women from those same contexts, ... and more.

So, as they say in lands in which I have lived for extended periods, 'Enjoy!' And do make use of options to respond, whether by a brief 'like', a comment, sharing a related anecdote, offering counter-perspectives or giving a critique. Let's use this first issue as a platform from which to engage in encouragement and in honing one another's understanding to the glory of our Saviour.