

Examples of Cruciformity

17. Marcel Rebiai

Marcel Rebiai was born in 1953 in Algeria to a Muslim family in Algeria. He lived with his family only to age of four or five, when he was abandoned by his family and sent to a military training camp for orphans in the Algerian desert, where the aim was to train the young children to be fighters and terrorists. Here he was taught to hate Jews, Americans, and French.

Our lives were considered worthless, so we were beaten up and many were killed. We were treated like material they could work with to test their hatred and cruelty on. Quite a few of my friends were tortured. And so I decided to escape.¹

He was eight years old when he made his way to a nearby city where he joined a large number who lived on the streets.

The streets became my school of life, my window on the world. I was ten years old and my view of life had been coloured by rejection, cruelty, danger and the basic fight for survival.²

Marcel met a little group from Switzerland who were working in Algeria and caring for street children. He asked them to take him home with them, figuring their home had to be better than living on the streets. In Switzerland, they took care of him and educated him in German and French.

However, as a teenager seeking to discover his real identity, he mixed in with the wrong company, became a drug user and dealer, and was sent to prison several times. Nevertheless, he started to read the Bible and became fascinated with the person of Jesus. A short while later, he had a "Damascus Road" experience in prison awaiting trial. He suddenly knew that an unseen Person was with him in his tiny cell.

The next moment I found myself on my knees and crying the same words that Paul cried, "What do you want me to do?" He told me, "I am the one you are looking for. I am the truth. I have always been with you. There is nowhere else to go." And that was the start of my new life.³

Amazingly, at his trial, he was freed and all his charges were dropped. He contacted a Christian community and lived with them for a time; then he spent three years with the Jesus Brotherhood in Germany. Following that he studied medicine for three years. Next,

1 Julia Fisher, *Israel: The Mystery of Peace -- True Stories Demonstrating God's Road Map for Peace in Israel Today* (Bucks, UK: Authentic Lifestyle, 2004) 140.

2 Julia Fisher, 141

3 Julia Fisher, 143

as a youth counsellor, he helped many young people to be set free from drugs and to find the Lord. After a time spent evangelizing Muslims in Europe, the Lord called him to Jerusalem. However, he went to Egypt instead, but was persecuted and driven out. For a time, he worked amongst Muslims and Jews in Marseilles, France. Finally, he arrived in Jerusalem in 1994.

Marcel is the founder and leader of the *Community of Reconciliation* which is based in Jerusalem. He is married to Regula and has four children. He is a speaker at many international conferences. *The Community of Reconciliation* works among Jews and Moslems in Israel and France. Their efforts concentrate on

- reconciliation based on the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah
- reconciliation between Jews and Arabs as well as between Israel and the nations
- community living, prayer and friendship evangelization⁴

Marcel and his community "have experienced massive and violent assaults from both Islamic fundamentalists and Jewish Orthodox groups."⁵ However, Marcel's attitudes and actions to such enemies is cruciform and his spoken and written teaching contains much exhortation to be cruciform, although he does not use that word. Marcel also has a positive message of hope that Israel will accept the message and nature of Jesus the Messiah and, as they live out His cruciform nature, will lead the world into His cruciform love.

When we ponder God's image and absorb into our hearts and being his character and word, which became flesh in Jesus, we will be increasingly transformed into his likeness. Our humanness, our discipleship and sonship have to do with this transformation into Jesus' image. God wants us to become people who are not afraid of closeness, people who can live in close proximity to all humanity, whatever their cultural, religious, historical or human backgrounds. If we know who God is and how eternally valuable we are to him, we can also approach others without prejudice or fear. We will not allow ourselves to be impressed by their outward appearance.

God longs to retrieve us from darkness, guilt and estrangement from himself. He wants to lead us into our true calling, as the likeness of his son takes on form and reality within us. God wants us to have a heart of flesh, in his likeness; a heart permeated with forgiveness. A heart of flesh continually releases others from guilt and accusation and helps them make a new beginning. For as God's sons and daughters we are not called to judge, but to seek and save that which is lost.⁶

4 Marcel Rebiai, *In God's Image*, a draft copy sent to me.

5 Julia Fisher, 149

6 Marcel Rebiai, *In God's Image*, a draft copy.