

Book Review

The Fifth Pillar (Third Edition) by David Zeidan, 2000, Piquant, PO Box 83, Carlisle CA3 9GR UK, pp127.

Reviewed by W. Evans

The Fifth Pillar is the personal story of a Syrian Muslim and his pilgrimage to faith in Jesus Christ, with the ensuing consequences. This third edition, just released, contains slight revisions in the text of earlier editions and, most importantly, an additional final chapter bringing the story up-to-date.

The book opens with a portrayal of a quarrel between Nabil*, his brother Anwar, and his employer Ahmad over his suspected conversion to, or at least interest in, Christianity. He is left with an ultimatum to return to Islam or lose his job.

The next several chapters give the background of his family and personal life leading up to that crisis. His family were of the upper-middle social class, fervent and proud Sunni Muslims. His parents assured the best possible education for their children, especially the two boys. At the same time they insisted on them faithfully observing the practices of Sunni Islam. They were not permitted to play with children that their parents considered socially inferior to them, and were especially forbidden any friendship with Christians.

Nabil found little satisfaction in these religious observances and avoided them to the best of his abilities, so becoming the black sheep of the family.

Continual unfavorable comparison between him and his model older brother created feelings of jealousy and only increased his rebellious spirit. His family became so concerned about his lack of religious fervor that they decided, much against his will, to send him on pilgrimage to Mecca, in hopes that this would revive his Muslim zeal. Although deeply impressed with certain aspects of the pilgrimage rites, Nabil returned to Syria more dissatisfied with Islam than before.

The plot then moves to Dubai, where Nabil, as an employee of Ahmad, became a prosperous and upwardly mobile businessman. Among other mail delivered to the business address, he discovered some Christian literature sent from Lebanon. Through an offer in this literature he received a New Testament and began reading it. One of his business contacts was an American Christian who patiently and gently answered his questions and objections concerning what he was reading. Through much inner conflict he finally came to personal faith in Jesus Christ. The resulting change in his character soon brought him to the point of crisis with brother and employer, then with the rest of his family.

The book then tells movingly of the pain of rejection by his family and of the loss of status and livelihood. While going through this process he met, fell in love with, and married Renata, a

* All personal names in the story have been changed for the personal security of those involved.

devout Roman Catholic from Poland. Although originally mystified by, and opposed to, Nabil's active and simple faith, she finally also came to personal faith in Christ. Her courageous loyalty to him during years of precarious and vagabond existence evokes strong admiration.

Nabil could not remain in Dubai without employment. He could not return to Syria for fear of his life. He was unable to get residency in Poland. The couple lived a hand-to-mouth existence in both Cyprus and Greece before finally receiving a visa to the UK. Two children were born to them during this unstable period. The story tells of near-miracles in extensions of temporary visas and of the last-minute provision of their UK visa the very day they would have had to leave Greece.

The final chapter recounts their struggles to adjust to life in a different culture, to procure residency status in

the UK and to find fulfilling service in a Christian organization devoted to the Arab world.

Besides being a captivating story in its own right, *The Fifth Pillar* gives valuable insights into Muslim family and social life, such as the importance of family honor, the authority of the family patriarch, the binding nature of family relationships, etc. It also portrays the spiritual, emotional and social conflicts of becoming a Christian from a practicing Muslim background. And finally it underlines the faithfulness of God through many trying circumstances, so that Nabil and Renata can now say that they have no regrets to the decision they have made and the consequences of it.

The book is currently available in English, French and German. The author hopes soon to have it published in Arabic.