

Evangelists Say Muslims Coming to Christ at Historic Rate

Christians ministering quietly in the Middle East say Muslims are coming to Christ at an unprecedented pace despite intense persecution of those who leave Islam.

“Probably in the last 10 years, more Muslims have come to faith in Christ than in the last 15 centuries of Islam,” said Tom Doyle, Middle East-Central Asia director for e3 Partners, a Texas-based missions agency.

A former pastor, Doyle has been to the Middle East around 80 times and last week returned to the U.S. from a trip to Jerusalem, where he said both Muslims and Jews are turning to Christianity.

Earlier this month, more than 200 former Muslims were baptized during a training conference in Europe led by Iran-born evangelist Lazarus Yeghnazar. Brenda Ajamian, a former missionary to the Middle East who partners with Yeghnazar’s 222 Ministries International, said the event was unlike anything she’d seen during her years ministering in Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan.

“That many Muslims who converted to Christ in one place boggled my mind because missionaries have worked in the Arab world and Muslim world generally for years and without much fruit,” Ajamian said. “God is at work among Muslims.”

Ajamian said she was told at the conference that drug addiction and depression run rampant in many nations, particularly in Iran, where the cleric-led government has attempted to squash pro-democracy movements. “People are so fed up with the kinds of lives they lead. ... They’re turning to

Christ even in spite of the very real possibility of persecution and death and imprisonment," she said.

Desperation is also a big factor in bringing many Jews to Christ, Doyle said. "In the last 20 years more Jews [also] have become followers of Jesus than in the last 2,000 years of Christianity," he said.

Radio, television and Internet-based Christian programming have been key in evangelizing Muslim nations. Yeghnazar claims more than 3,000 Iranians are converted each month through his Farsi-language television and Internet broadcasts.

And Doyle said Father Zakaria Botross, a born-again Coptic priest, reaches about 60 million people through his television programs broadcast across the Middle East. "The apostle Paul to the Muslims is no question Father Zakaria," Doyle said.

But many Muslim-background believers have said they came to Christ after having dreams and visions of Jesus.

"I can't tell you how many Muslims I've met who say: 'I was content. I was a Muslim, and all of a sudden I get this dream about Jesus and He loved me and said come follow Me,'" Doyle said.

Doyle notes that the supernatural is an important part of the Islamic faith. Through the course of his life, Mohammed claimed to have had visions and encounters, particularly of the angel Gabriel.

"God is going into their context," said Doyle. But instead of finding guidance from Allah, Muslims are finding Jesus.

Haytham Abi Haydar, pastor of the Arabic Fellowship Alliance Church in Dearborn, Mich., a heavily Islamic Detroit suburb, said dreams and the supernatural are important to Muslims. "They're so powerful and real. They do consider that as a channel to speak to God and see something important," said Abi

Haydar, who's also heard of Jesus coming to Muslims in dreams.

Ajamian said churches of Muslim-background believers are growing "like wildfire" both in the Middle East and in Europe, which has seen a boom in immigration from Muslim nations.

"The Muslims that are saved ... it's like they can't tell the story fast enough," Ajamian said.

Doyle said though the harvest is ripe in Middle Eastern nations, the spiritual warfare also has ramped up. "People feel it. It just feels more intense," he said.

The stress, he said, is particularly high right now during Ramadan, the time Muslims fast and pray in commemoration of the time they believe Mohammed divinely received the first verses of the Quran. He said people are getting sick and even having nightmares.

"When Ramadan comes, you really sense the war in the heavenlies," he said.

Christians in many Muslim nations can be imprisoned or killed for converting from Islam. But Ajamian said the persecution is a sign that God is answering prayers for the Muslim world. "There's a move of God," she said. "...The devil doesn't like it, but there is a huge move."