

When Abraham's 'Other' Descendants Come to Christ

✖ Although it takes a back seat to rumors of war, a tsunami of faith is quietly overtaking the Muslim world. Islamic adherents are laying aside their allegiance to Muhammad to follow Jesus Christ, despite the social ostracism, persecution and possible martyrdom that converts to Christianity face. Propelled by dreams, visions and miracles, this wave of revival is bringing vast numbers of Muslims—some say millions—into God's kingdom.

Middle East expert Joel Rosenberg believes more Muslims have come to faith in Christ in the last 30 years than at any time in history. "The vast majority of those conversions have happened since 9/11," he notes. He relates some of their stories in his book, *Inside the Revolution*.

A few examples of this flock of converts:

—During an Easter service at Vatican City in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI baptized Magdi Allam—Italy's most prominent Muslim commentator—with six other people.

—A year later, ex-Sunni Muslim Emir Caner was elected president of Truett-McConnell College, which is affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention. Caner converted as a teenager in 1982.

—The same week of Caner's appointment, Mosab Hassan Yousef—son of an influential Hamas leader in the Palestinian West Bank of Israel—publicly embraced Christianity four years after his salvation. He now attends an evangelical church in San Diego.

One missionary to Iran, who asked to remain anonymous, says a "tremendous" number of Muslims there are seeing that "Islam as a religion has failed them personally, economically,

spiritually and socially.”

Tom Doyle, the Middle East director for Dallas-based e3 Partners, an independent missions agency, says his group planted 127 churches last year in the region, a significant upswing since the start of the decade. He says the news from the Middle East is awakening Christians in the West and showing them that, despite headline-grabbing terrorists, all is not lost.

“We’ve seen 1,000 Muslims come to Christ this year in Syria alone,” Doyle says. “All the partner ministries we work with say this is the new revival.”

However, California pastor Hormoz Shariat, whose International Antioch Ministries broadcasts by satellite to the Middle East and Europe, cautions against fixing specific numbers to salvations because Iranian churches shy away from publicizing conversion counts. “It provokes the government [and] hurts the church in Iran,” Shariat says. “But our network is growing fast. Every day we have stories of dreams and visions and miracles.”

Al Janssen, communications director of Open Doors International, also discovered that dreams and visions of Christ were the starting points of the spiritual journeys of dozens of Muslim-background believers in the Middle East whom he interviewed for his 2007 book, *Secret Believers*. Then, after coming to Christ, they would become creative evangelists, he says.

Typically their witnessing occurs only in one-on-one settings, with the believer asking questions to determine if the other person is receptive to the gospel. “They go through a series of questions, and if they sense the person is getting hostile, they resist playing their hand,” Janssen says. “One ex-imam had a list of 62 people he was discipling. I met an ex-terrorist who had been with a group for seven years, and now

he's proudly witnessing for his faith."

Despite these optimistic accounts, a spiritual battle rages that requires vigilant prayer. As Doyle puts it: "The task is so enormous, and the pressure is so fierce."

Rosenberg once saw a leading Saudi cleric on the Al-Jazeera TV network lamenting the fact that 6 million Muslims were converting to Christianity every year. "There's such an enormous number of Muslims converting through the region, it's a big topic for Muslim leaders who are upset about it," Rosenberg says. "You're seeing some blowback."

The dedication of these new converts is impressive when considering the common threat of ostracism from family and social networks. Jonathan Oloyede, senior associate pastor of Glory House in London, came to Christ as a Muslim while studying at a Nigerian medical school. He labels withdrawal of fellowship as one of the greatest challenges Muslims face.

"They have to overcome ... the sense of guilt and shame their relatives and friends try to place on them," he says. "Sometimes this can be very overwhelming and some cannot handle it, so they go back."

Yet many persevere despite persecution that includes death. In Iran the opposition comes from both the mosques and the government, says a missionary who goes only by the name "Pooya."

He says people especially fear the religious police: "The [Basij, Mujahedin and Revolutionary Guard] rule by the Quran. These are the ones who will come after people, beating them and killing them with no regard to the laws of the land. ... They are free to be judge, jury and executioner with no repercussions for their acts."

Prayer is vital. However, three converts in Egypt told Janssen that Christians in America should pray "with" them, not "for" them.

“If you pray for us, you will pray for our safety, and the persecution will stop,” they told him. “If you pray with us, we can be sure the persecution will increase. Pray we will see millions [come] to Christ. We know there will be backlash. Pray we will be faithful, even if it costs us our lives.”

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