

Conversion: A one-way street?

by Cal_Thomas

Pope Benedict XVI last week baptized a man into the Catholic Church. The man, Magdi Allam, had converted from another faith. There is nothing unusual about that. People convert from non-faith to faith, or from one religion to another, or within faiths to different denominations all the time. However, this conversion was different.

Mr. Allam, who has taken a new name, Magdi Cristiano Allam, was a Muslim, and not just your average, everyday Muslim. Mr. Allam was a prized "moderate" Muslim, upon whom many in Italy and the West have pinned their hopes for a new generation of similarly moderate Muslims who would renounce terrorism and violence and lead Islam into a bright new promised land of tolerance, inclusion and religious pluralism.

From the reaction in the Muslim world to Mr. Allam's conversion, there apparently remains a very long way to go before moderation is achieved. The Children of Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness before they arrived in the Promised Land. The journey to the promised land of Islamic moderation may take a lot longer "if the wanderers get there at all.

The Wall Street Journal reported recently that Allam's conversion had produced "ecstasy in Muslim lands," which is becoming increasingly easy to do. The baptismal ceremony was televised, its pictures flashed around the world, prompting some to worry that the Vatican was engaging in a ritual of triumphalism. Mr. Allam is giving his critics plenty of fuel for their fires. He says his conversion has "liberated" him from "darkness" and allowed him to see Islam more clearly. "I realized that Islam is not compatible with core values such as respect for life and freedom of choice," he said in an interview.

As if to underscore his point, three bodyguards provided by the Italian government stood nearby. When someone converts to Islam in the West, there is no need for security.

The Vatican issued a statement that said that Mr. Allam's views "remain his personal opinion without in any way becoming the official expression of the position of the pope or the Holy See."

Maybe not, but they are increasingly the expressions of many other converts from Islam and one wonders why we aren't listening to what these converts have to say about their old faith, instead of to those still in the faith who, it could be fairly concluded, might have an agenda that is not in the best interests of the West.

The director of the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center in Amman, Jordan, Aref Ali Nayed, denounced Mr. Allam's conversion and the ceremony surrounding it as a "triumphalist tool for scoring points." Most religions celebrate in some way the conversion of people to their faith and Islam is no exception.

The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Muslim advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., but with chapters in many states, recently sent out a press release touting the election of the second Muslim to the U.S. House of Representatives. Rep. Andre Carson, a Democrat like his Muslim colleague, Rep. Keith Ellison of Minnesota, won a special election in Indiana's 7th District. Raised a Baptist and attending inner-city Catholic schools, Mr. Carson converted to Islam after reading, among other things, "The Autobiography of Malcolm X." When his grandmother, Rep. Julia Carson, died in December, Nation of Islam firebrand Louis Farrakhan delivered a eulogy at her funeral.

The CAIR press release read like triumphalism to me. And why is CAIR encouraging other Muslims to run for office in state, local and federal races? Does CAIR have an agenda that could lead to triumphs of a different sort?

When someone converts to Islam, the religion the person left behind doesn't issue threats or express fury. Only when someone converts from Islam to something else, or to unbelief, is there rage and proclamations that the convert is deserving of death.

In Christianity and Judaism, among other faiths, people enjoy freedom of conscience. In Islam, they are mostly intimidated to stay in that faith. That's what the converts from Islam tell us in increasing numbers. We should be listening more to what they are saying instead of investing too much faith in "moderate" Islam. Faith in moderate Islam may be the biggest counterfeit faith of all.

(Direct all MAIL for Cal Thomas to: 2225 Kenmore Ave., Suite 114, Buffalo, N.Y. 14207. Readers may also e-mail.) (c) 2008 Tribune Media Services, Inc.

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