

CRACKS IN THE FOUNDATION OF ISLAM?

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1 Introduction

In this paper I will first summarize the information in the Camel Training Manual (CTM)¹. Specifically, all the information I am using here is from *Appendix 1: Islam Today*, pp 75-93. The appendix itself is a challenging piece of writing, because it contains information from many different sources and it is not always clearly referenced. Also, it is a training manual, like the name says, so it was not necessarily composed with academia in mind. Finally, I don't know who put it together—there is no indication of an author anywhere.

Nonetheless, it is interesting material and worth our attention; it is obviously from someone working in South or Southeast Asia. My own research involves, among other things, trying to discern why it is that after 800+ years of preaching missions to *Dâr al-Islâm*, it is only in the last few decades that we are seeing a substantial and perhaps surprising increase in conversions from Islâm to Christianity, or conversion within Islâm to being an Muslim follower of Jesus—sometimes also called Insiders, 'Isá Muslims or Messianic Muslims. I will therefore summarize the info in the CTM and then offer some additional comments and observations.

2 Summary from the Camel Training Manual

The CMT author identifies eleven indicators that in his judgment show that 'Islam's foundation is cracking'. (p. 75) I am always suspicious of this sort of language though - when I look at Europe and North America I actually feel like Christianity's foundation is cracking. And let us not forget that predictions of Islâm's demise have been premature in the past;

¹ See www.gracecommunitychurch.org.uk/resources/CamelTrainingManual.pdf (accessed May 13 2009).

no less a great mind than Samuel Zwemer wrote a book called *The Disintegration of Islam* all the way back in 1916², and let us just say that far from disintegrating Islâm has grown a great deal—growth in terms of numbers and power, for what that's worth.

In any case here are the proposed indicators of cracks in the Foundation of Islâm:

1. **Spotlight:** After 9/11 Islâm was literally forced to become part of the popular mind, in that it was no longer a topic one could simply dismiss or ignore.
2. **Cloud of Shame:** Terrorism and Islâm are becoming synonymous, causing some Muslims to ask difficult questions.
3. **No Borders:** Some closed countries have recently become open to the presence of Christian missionaries.
4. **Reformation:** With the translation of the *Qur'ân* into many popular languages under the initiative of former King Fahd of Saudi Arabia³, many Muslims can now read the book and find it, let us say, less than satisfying. These translations along with the fact that the *aḥadâth* (pl. of *ḥadīth*) are available online for free represent a decentralization of power, out of the hands of scholars and religious leaders. 'Muslim laymen are reading the Koran in their heart language and discovering that what their Imams have been teaching them is not aligned with the Koran.' (p. 78)
5. **Last Two Decades:** 'More Muslims have come to Christ in the last two decades than at any other time in Islamic history.' (p. 80) Each year 900,000 Muslims...cross over into Christianity.
6. **Abundant Tools:** abundant and effective tools, such as:
 - a. Use of *Qur'ân* in evangelism
 - b. Muslim-friendly Bibles and tracts
 - c. The Jesus Film in local languages
 - d. Radio ministry targeting Muslims
 - e. Audio cassette distribution

² Which you can download at www.archive.org/details/disintegrationof00zwem (accessed 13 May 2009).

³ For more info see <http://www.kingfahdbinabdulaziz.com/main/m600.htm>.

7. **Increasing Missionary Force:** ‘Between 1982 and 2001, missionaries⁴ working with Muslims have nearly doubled from an estimated 15,000 to somewhere in excess of 27,000.’ (p. 82) In 1978 two events occurred that helped to publicize ‘how many Muslims lived in the shadow of Islam and how many workers and resources were needed.’ (p. 82). Those events were:
 - a. The publication of the *Glen Eyrie report* on Muslim Evangelization to the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism.
 - b. The decision by Brother Andrew, head of Open Doors ministry⁵, to engage the Middle East and the Muslim world. September 11 is also mentioned as an event that increased the number of people interested in being missionaries in the Muslim World.
8. **Back to Jerusalem:** An initiative by the Asian churches, especially Chinese and Korean, to evangelize Westward, roughly following the old Silk Road, thus planting churches and making converts, so that the Gospel will eventually, after it’s long Westward meandering to Europe, North America, and then East Asia, reach back to Jerusalem.
9. **The Burden of the Indian Church in the USA**
10. **Dreams:** Muslim converts often reference dreams or visions. There are four recurring themes:
 - a. ‘Empowering dreams give boldness and strength to endure persecution.’ (p. 85).
 - b. Visions of heaven, or messages from heaven.
 - c. Healing through dreams.
 - d. ‘Dreams that send Muslims on a journey that leads them to the Truth about the prophet Isa.’ (p. 89).
11. **Church Planting Movements:** A CPM is ‘a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within

⁴ I’m not certain of this, but I presume this refers only to Protestant/evangelical/charismatic missionaries, and would thus not include Catholic religious, say. The figure appears to be from this article (accessed 13 May 2009) <http://dawnbible.com/2003/03/10-hl.htm>.

⁵ Founded in 1955, this ministry originally focused on distributing Bibles (sometimes smuggling them in) behind the Iron Curtain. Brother Andrew wrote about this in his now-classic book *God’s Smuggler*.

a given people group or population segment'.⁶ 'In Northern Africa, 16,000 Muslims converted to Christianity', and in one South Asian country '[f]rom 1998-2003, 150,000 Muslims have come to faith'. (p. 92) According to David Garrison, an authority on CPM's, 'the past decade has seen more than 13,000 Kazakhs come to faith worshipping in more than 300 new Kazakh churches'. (p. 93)

3 Observations and Comments

Appendix 1: Islam Today offers us a brief glimpse at how one community evaluates the weaknesses of Islâm. On the whole the document is optimistic and, as I implied in the introduction, perhaps too optimistic. That is one observation of mine. The second is that while a couple of dates and events are mentioned, a lot has been left out. And thirdly, some of the factors he mentions are also strengths of Islâm, and the author does not take this into account. Let me deal with the topics one by one:

Spotlight: I agree that this is a key issue—Islâm cannot be ignored anymore. Whatever opinion one comes to regarding this venerable civilization/religion/empire, several things have happened in the last half of the 20th century and in this new century that have focused attention on Islâm more than ever. I would add a few things to his list—it's not just about 9/11. There have been other events that drew the West's attention to the Muslim world like the Second Arab Oil Embargo (1973-74) and the Iran Hostage Crisis (1979-81), not to mention the terror attacks in Europe, in London (2005) and Madrid (2004). Those are just a few things that could be added, but clearly if we only go back to 2001, as important as that date was, then we lose the awareness that this has been an incremental increase in attention and awareness.

I also think we should recognize that the press, governmental organizations, and Islâmic societies have done a fine job of portraying Islâm in a positive light, insisting that terror is not in any substantial or important

⁶ According to the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Accessed 13 May 2009, www.imb.org/CPM/Glossary.htm.

way linked to Islâm, the *Qur'ân*, or the Prophet. On the one hand, my experience tells me that people are finding that those explanations are wearing thin. On the other hand though, this increased exposure to Islâm has functioned, at times, as free publicity, and just as Muslims have converted to Christianity, the sword cuts both ways, and Christians have converted to Islâm as well for a number of reasons.

Cloud of Shame: I agree with CTM's assessment on this. But this also leads us to some dangerous ground. Some Muslims start to doubt Islâm because of it, but other Muslims simply become more convinced that the 'shame' surrounding Islâm today is the result of Islâmophobia—they feel like they are in a corner and are the victims of a huge attempt to discredit what is to them, very obviously, the pinnacle of human history. When someone is convinced that they are the ultimate victim, then any act of violence, including 9/11, becomes self-defense.

No Borders: I'm not sure that I agree with this. The author points to Iraq and Afghanistan as examples. Afghanistan certainly is more open to Christians now than under the Taliban, but it is hard to see that as a major success, as the country—if one can call it that—teeters on the edge of anarchy. Also, regarding Iraq, I would say that the huge exodus of indigenous Christians is more harmful to Christian mission than whatever benefit we see from Westerners going there. I say that with some reservation though, because who knows what will happen in the future? Perhaps I will be wrong, if Iraq can become a stable republic with something resembling democracy and human rights, where Muslims can legally convert to Christianity (and I do not think this will happen—human rights grew out of the Judeo-Christian soil of Europe, and cannot be transplanted to the arid soil of *Dâr al-Islâm*). Other countries in *Dâr al-Islâm* (Pakistan, Yemen) teeter on the edge of disintegration (think Somalia), as their population growth far outpaces their development of agriculture and natural resources. I would then project more failed states in *Dâr al-Islâm*, and failed states are very difficult places for Western missionaries to function.

Reformation: I suppose there is a question about how one interprets the Protestant Reformation. Of course, some Muslim scholars don't appre-

ciate the comparison at all, and to be honest most evangelicals have a very shallow and inadequate understand of the actual historical events that transpired in the 16th century. That having been said, his central point about what I would call the decentralization of hermeneutical authority—in this case away from the ‘*ulamá*’ and into the hands of the average Muslim—is certainly a positive development and indeed is a legitimate parallel with the 16th century European reformations. Moreover, the *aḥādīth* are now available online and contain much information about the life of the Prophet and the early *ummah* that many Muslims have not previously had ready access to. If we look at the testimonies of ex-Muslims, including both converts to Christianity and especially converts to secularism/humanism/agnosticism/deism/atheism, we find a recurring theme: actually reading the Qur’ān and the *aḥādīth* is often a key step in their apostasy⁷.

We find statements like, ‘After reading the Koran a few times I started wondering about some of the verses. There were things in the Koran that were making me nervous, also the many stories about Muhammad were also cause for concern...’ (Ibn Warraq, p. 119). Other ex-Muslims are much more direct with their language: ‘After converting [to Islām ...] I read translations of the *hadith* on the Internet. I was often disturbed by them. In some cases the Prophet is described as brutal, not exactly Christlike.’ (p. 125) Or this: ‘Then I read the Koran for the first time critically. It was a disgusting book full of hatred and intolerance.’ (p. 128) Or finally, ‘It slowly dawned on me that the Koran was not the infallible, immutable word of God, but a fascist slur on humanity’. (p. 130), and examples could be multiplied *ad infinitum*.

Last Two Decades: My problem with this is that it is not necessarily false, but it paints an incomplete picture. Islām is growing faster than Christianity, because Muslims have more children than Christians. It is that simple. Nowhere is there a mention of the very real, very concerning demographic realities the world is facing: poor, Muslim countries have quickly-growing populations, and those countries cannot feed or supply water, education, or jobs for those people. Some will emigrate, others will turn to Christ, and others will turn to terrorism. Europe is

⁷ A voluminous collection of such testimonies can be found in Ibn Warraq (ed), *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out* (Prometheus Books 2004).

quickly becoming an Islâmic society and there is no possibility, in my view, of reversing this trend. The West has opted for hedonism, abortion, and birth control, and Western Europe has consequentially made a collective, if perhaps not entirely conscious, decision to eliminate itself. That is the reality, and it will happen. Where are the cracks in the foundations of Islâm when we consider this reality? Whatever the number of Muslims who convert to Christianity may be, it is certainly smaller than the number of new Muslims born on a given day.

Abundant Tools: I agree with the author—a more sensitive and informed presentation of the Gospel has made a big difference. One glaring omission though is that he left out the internet, which has had a huge impact.

Increasing Missionary Force: I agree with the author that many more people are considering missionary work in the Muslim World than ever before. But there are still some very real concerns: missionaries are like other professionals, meaning that today there is a real possibility of changing careers after a few years. Is it really better to have five missionaries who are learning Arabic and getting familiar with the local culture and who will leave after five years than to have one missionary who has mastered the language and spent many years in the region? It is an error to assume that more is better; indeed sometimes more is not better, as inexperienced short-term missionaries can at times create more trouble than benefit. I would also point out that the now-popular short-term missions are a very resource-intensive (i.e., expensive) form of ministry that is generally speaking not a good fit for the Muslim world. It is one thing to send folks to build a church in Mexico, it is another to send them to Morocco or Jordan or Pakistan.

Back to Jerusalem: I think it is too early to see how fruitful B2J will ultimately be. Evangelical mission have been run like American businesses for decades now. What will be the outcome of a much less structured approach as lived out by the Chinese faithful, who also have fewer financial resources?

The Burden of Indian Churches in the USA: To be honest I know nothing about this topic.

Dreams: I agree that dreams and visions are a major element in what is going on today in the Muslim World. Many Muslims who commit to following Christ - either within Islâm or as Christians - explain that dreams or a dream/vision were one of the main things that brought about conversion.

CPM's: The research behind CPM's indicates that this strategy is indeed much more promising than what was previously the custom—bringing the MBB's into the local Christian church. That was very difficult for the local Christians who had often suffered centuries of abuse at the hands of Islâm, and it was difficult for the MBB's, as the different cultural and linguistic customs were not easily assimilable. In terms of mission to the Muslim world, a major breakthrough would be a CPM among Muslim Arabs, and that has never happened. Certainly, developments among the Berbers and Bengalis and others are encouraging, but Islâm comes with a culture and a language - and both are Arabic.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion I believe that the author's conclusion that there are cracks in the foundation of Islâm are premature. Even if the number of conversions to Christ tripled or quadrupled it would still be a very minute number in comparison with the total Islâmîc population. Nevertheless, this unattributed Appendix provides some rare insights into the small but growing number of Muslims who convert to Christianity.