

From: Ruth Parker

Sent: Monday, September 14, 2020 11:54 AM

To[list of other recipients redacted]; Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fw: Mark Durie on Islam's Crisis of Apostasy

I have talked with two Iranian expats, one a Christian and the other an atheist. Both told me about the horrors and the dangers of living in an Iranian dictatorship.

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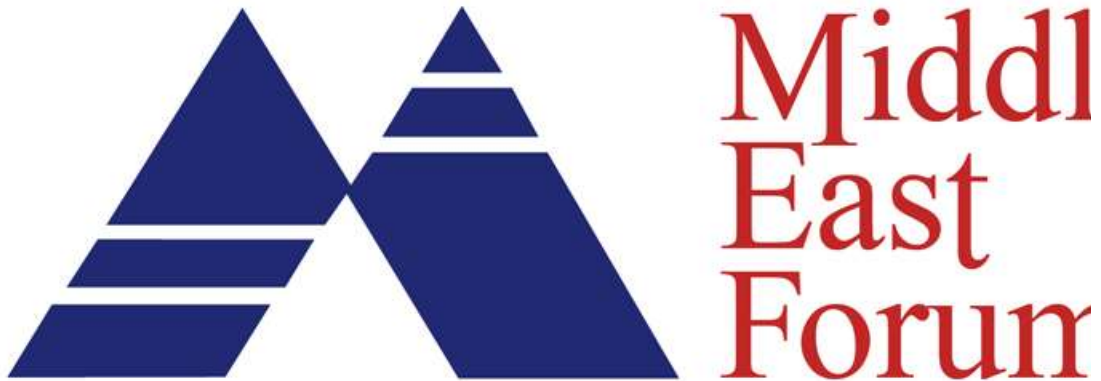
From: Middle East Forum

To: Ruth Parker

Sent: Monday, September 14, 2020, 10:28:56 AM PDT

Subject: Mark Durie on Islam's Crisis of Apostasy

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Mark Durie on Islam's Crisis of Apostasy

by Marilyn Stern

[Middle East Forum Webinar](#)

September 13, 2020

<https://www.meforum.org/61522/mark-durie-on-islam-crisis-of-apostasy>



Mark Durie, Middle East Forum Writing Fellow, and Senior Research Fellow of the Arthur Jeffery Centre for the Study of Islam, spoke to participants in a July 25 Middle East Forum Webinar ([video](#)) about the crisis of faith in Islam as disillusioned Muslims leave the religion.



"If you want to understand a religion, you need to understand what it says about the human condition ... the rewards it offers, the promises it makes," Durie explained. "Islam's view of humanity is that human persons are basically weak and easily led astray, and [that] the solution to this problem is divine guidance, which is imposed by ... all the institutions of society and the state keeping people on the right path."

Islam's promise is "success" in this life as well as the next. Indeed, the Islamic call to prayer contains the words "come to success" (*hayya ala al-falah*). The Quran is all about winners and losers, teaching that Allah sent Muhammad "the religion of truth," that Muslims have a divine destiny to command others, and that Islam will dominate other religions.



The Turkish capture of Constantinople, 1453

These promises were "amply confirmed for the first 900 years of Islam" by "spectacular conquests and expansion" encompassing large swathes of Asia, Africa, and Europe. "Four out of five of the ancient centers of Christianity fell to Islam: Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople," noted Durie. "Only one of those ancient centers, Rome, remained unconquered."

From the end of the fifteenth century onward, however, Muslim rule significantly receded with defeats across the globe, culminating in the dissolution of the Ottoman empire and eventually the establishment of the state of Israel. Just as military conquests were seen as proof of Islam's promise as the "true religion," military defeats caused a "crisis of faith" among Muslim leaders. "The theological question was 'What went wrong?'" explained Durie.

In seeking an answer to Islam's failure, Islamic revivalist movements proliferated over the last two centuries with the aim of restoring past successes. From Wahhabism to al Qaeda, ISIS to Tablighi Jamaat, fundamentalist movements insisted that glory could be restored to Islam by "implement[ing] Allah's laws faithfully," and "every human problem would be solved."

However, wherever Islamism has gained power, "the results have not been impressive." The list of failures is long when considering rule under the Taliban, the Iranian revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood's failed government in Egypt, Erdoğan's Turkey, Algeria's failed Islamic revival, and the former Sudanese regime's jihad on its own people. "The harder revivalist movements struggled to promote the success of Islam, the more evidence they seem to provide of Islam's inability to solve the human problem." Most Islamic nations today continue to struggle to bring prosperity and development to their own people.

"Whenever Islamic revivalist movements have seized power ... the long-term result is apostasy from Islam."

Islam's failure to fulfill its promise of success has created a theological crisis among many

Muslims. Those nations that have experienced Islamic revivalism or "radical jihad" have produced a growing number of Muslims who want to leave Islam, either converting to other faiths like Christianity or abandoning religion altogether. "Whenever Islamic revivalist movements have seized power ... the long-term result is apostasy from Islam," said Durie. "[I]t's one thing to believe in a utopia and quite another ... to experience the ... cold reality of an Islamic dystopia."

Although plenty of Muslims still see Islam as perfect and beyond criticism, the "extraordinary shift after 1,400 years" is that many are expressing severe doubts.

After the 1979 Iranian revolution, the handful of Iranians whom Western missionaries had converted to Christianity in prior centuries experienced persecution. They went underground and their numbers grew, even though the penalty in Sharia law for leaving Islam is death. Today it is estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of secret Christian converts in Iran. Iranian Christian converts "resented

[Islam's] reliance on force to compel their belief. They wanted to be free to choose their own path. ... [T]hey rejected Islam first."

Similarly, many Muslim refugees who have fled ISIS to Europe are also leaving Islam. Formerly empty churches in Germany are "overflowing" with Muslim refugees from the Middle East who have converted to Christianity.

Others who leave Islam choose to be irreligious or become atheists. In Saudi Arabia, 19% of those surveyed say they are "not a religious person" and 5% identify as atheist (the same percentage of atheists found in the U.S.), despite a Saudi law that proclaims atheists to be "terrorists."

While it is true that there are many converts to Islam in the West, this is because the utopian ideal does not conflict with a dystopian reality. For similar reasons, second generation Muslim immigrants in the West are often more eager than their parents to embrace Islamic revivalism because they didn't directly experience "the failure of Islam" firsthand. "[I]f you've lived under the boot of [a] revolutionary Islamic regime in Iran, you have a much more realistic view of the effect of Islam on a nation."

According to Durie, we in the West are "hamstrung intellectually because we don't understand faith," which is "very profound in the way it shapes people." Because Muslims in the West are perceived as an "oppressed minority," discussing the deficiencies of Islamic revivalism is considered politically incorrect or even Islamophobic. "[P]eople get shut down because of the things they say about the differences between religions," said Durie. It's ironic that "a religion that proclaims supremacy and dominance over others should be treated as a disadvantaged group that needs to be empowered."

This opens the door for groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to make headway, notably under the Obama administration. Countering their growing influence requires "freedom of speech, freedom of discussion and debate about these matters."

Marilyn Stern is communications coordinator at the Middle East Forum.

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