

Convenience Conversions and an Inconvenient Truth

by Hugh Fitzgerald (June 2016)



Bathhurst Prison New South Wales

Prisoners at Kariiong Prison in New South Wales (Australia) have [recently complained](#) that they have been threatened by Muslim inmates with violence unless they convert to Islam. The same threats have been reported from at least two other prisons in Australia, and from Great Britain, France, and other European countries with Muslim populations greater than 2-3%. Muslims now constitute a significant percentage of the prison population in Europe, much higher than their percentage in the general population (and both percentages are growing rapidly). For example, Muslims are at present 5% of the British population, 15% of the prison population, and 44% of those in maximum security prisons. In France, they are 8% of the population, and 70% of the prison population. In Germany, they are 6.5% of the population and over 30% of the prison population.

Muslims may be outnumbered by the non-Muslim prisoners, but they constitute a determined and violent bloc; some would call them a “gang.” The non-Muslims they target are literally a captive audience. Muslim prisoners are able to threaten with impunity the non-Muslim prisoners who, far from being protected by the prison authorities, are left to shift for themselves. And it looks like the threats are working. As one report put it, “The demands for halal food and Korans and prayer mats by non-Arab inmates are increasing.” This kind of conversion, to ensure better treatment and above all, protection from violence, including that from Muslims, has even been given a name: “convenience conversion.”

“Steve McMahon, chairman of Public Service Association Corrections branch [in Sydney], said the forced conversions are likely ‘extremist-related’ [but] ‘these people are clearly doing it for some reasons other than their devotion to the faith and it is concerning in light of how dangerous some of these individuals have become,’ he told *The Daily Telegraph*, adding that Muslims in prison are

'not upstanding citizens' who don't believe in violence."

So, on the one hand, according to this official, these "forced conversions" are said to be "[Muslim] extremist-related." But at the same time, he insists that "they are clearly doing it for some reasons other than their devotion to the faith." Is he quite sure? Hasn't the history of Islam been that of non-Muslims converting initially for reasons "other than devotion to the faith" but, over time, reconciling themselves to what had been imposed upon them and becoming in the end true believers? What has Islam been, over the past 1300 years, for the non-Muslims whose lands were conquered and who were then subjugated, and either killed or converted or had the Jizyah exacted from them by their conquerors, if not both an extortion racket and a "faith"?

Of course, some of the Australian prison authorities might be laboring under the impression that the prisoners who are converting are doing so of their own free will, and that they have no business interfering in an inmate's choice of religion. Their reluctance to act decisively could also be a defeatist admission of fear: we don't dare antagonize Muslim prisoners – who "are not upstanding citizens who don't believe in violence" – by attempting to prevent their campaigns of conversion. Besides, the most immediate worry for the West in prisons is not that of forced conversion to Islam, but the "radicalization of those who are already Muslims," especially effective in prisons, where young inmates are 'in awe of convicted terrorists'" (from the 2012 report on Islamisation in prisons by the Cambridge criminologist Alison Liebling).

The same problem of "convenience conversions" has [long plagued prisons in Britain](#).

Here is the story of one holdout:

One young woman whose brother is serving a lengthy sentence in a top security prison in England told how he was being bullied by members of a Muslim gang who were trying to force him to convert to Islam.

"He just looks like a broken man," she said, again asking not to be identified. "He's tearful on visits, and I'm just really scared for him. He's been physically assaulted. He's had black eyes. In the showers, he got threatened with a knife.

“He’s not going to back down. He’s not going to convert for anyone. He just spends his time hiding in his cell. He’s got at least another five years to serve. I don’t know how much longer he can hold out.”

And another describes the protection offered, against both Muslims and non-Muslims:

Another serving prisoner told the Mail: “Some people really struggle when they come in to prison. They will try to find some support – and the Muslim groups offer that. A lot of black men in their early 20s who are in on violence or drug charges are targeted.

“They would maybe have been part of gangs for a long time. But in prison, they’re on their own. I’ve seen guys who’ve been beaten up or bullied, had their fags nicked and their cells turned over, that sort of thing, and then they’ll be befriended by some of the Muslims.

“Then the guy will put in a formal request saying that he wants to change his religion. He might have a meeting with the governor and he goes through the process of becoming a Muslim. Everyone knows why they are doing it – it’s not as if they have suddenly found God.”

When a prisoner converts to Islam, it’s like joining a gang – you have ready-made Muslim “brothers” who will stick by you and protect you, including offering protection from themselves. This kind of protection from physical or other harm resembles Mafia tactics, where they extort protection money against damage that they themselves could inflict on the victim; the Mafia originates in Sicily, which for several centuries was under Muslim domination and influence.

But one British prison official said: “These gangs use their faith as a cover for violence and intimidation, threatening non-Muslims and pressuring them to convert to Islam.”

Again, here we have officials refusing to take Islam seriously as the explanation for Muslim behavior: *“These gangs use their faith as a cover for violence and intimidation.”* Rather, it’s the opposite: their faith is not a mere “cover,” i.e., excuse, but *the reason* for the violence and intimidation [of non-

Muslims]. The refusal to recognize the nature of Islam keeps getting in the way of satisfactory analysis.

The most optimistic view of these prison conversions is that they are not sincere. The very word "convenience" suggests that this conversion is ephemeral, a temporary accommodation with a difficult reality from which there is at present no escape, and implicitly, as soon as the prisoner-converts are freed, they will slough off their "conversions" at the prison gates. They are, our security services must hopefully assume, feigning belief, asking for those Korans and prayer mats and halal food only as props for their act, and not because they are true enthusiasts. And, especially in the case of the great increase in halal food requests, those authorities may have a point. Such diet requests do not necessarily bespeak an equal rise in real conversions. Whenever there are alternatives to a standard menu, those choices are often rumored to be better fare. Think of how the special menus on airplanes – kosher, halal, vegetarian – are widely assumed to be prepared with more culinary flair than whatever is on the standard menu. Inmates make the same assumption about their prison food; halal meals are reputed to be better than the regular fare; professing Islam may only be the justification for demanding them. This is the least dangerous kind of "convenience conversion," and as long as it is insincere, need not be cause for alarm.

If most of these "convenience conversions" are in fact temporary, of going along to get along while in prison, that would be some relief. I have been unable to find any statistics on how long these prison conversions last once the "believer" is out of prison. This is understandable. If Western governments are able to collect such information, they obviously would not want it known; just imagine the howls of outrage from CAIR and its camp-followers if they did. But I find plausible the suggestion that some of those prisoners who converted in prison originally out of fear of Muslim threats, subsequently try to justify their own behavior – to themselves – by finding things about Islam that will make them think better of the faith, and therefore, of themselves; they manage to convince themselves that their original "conversion" was genuine. First feigning to be converts, they then become converts in truth, and even, in some cases, enthusiastic promoters of the faith which has provided them with an Instant Brotherhood, a Complete Regulation of Daily Life, and a Total Explanation of the Universe, all of great psychic comfort for people in (and out

of) prison. These prison converts in the West who do not slough off Islam once they are out of prison, but become true believers, swelling the ranks of the faithful, are a worry.

But aren't Muslims embarrassed by this use of threats to gain prison converts? Not at all. No prominent Muslims have spoken out against this. From their point of view, since it is only through Islam that men learn and practice righteousness, bringing them to Islam is the greatest benefit that can be lavished upon them. Why should they care what instrument is employed to attain that worthy end? These prison conversions are now a permanent problem for the West's security services, with no solution or amelioration in sight. And since most of these prisoners are already schooled in violence, they are likely to be more susceptible to recruitment as future Jihadis. And the matter gets nothing like the attention it deserves from the security services.

Just imagine, by contrast, what the reaction of practically all right-thinking people would be to reports that *Christian* prisoners were making systematic attempts to convert *Muslim* prisoners through the threat of violence. From sea to shining sea there would be a storm of nonstop outrage on the airwaves and the Internet that nothing could assuage, with Christian clergymen in the lead. But that hypothetical, of course, is absurd. There have been no reports, in or out of prison, of Christians threatening Muslims with violence unless they convert to Christianity.

What if the authorities in the United States were to establish all-Muslim prisons, or Muslim-only areas within prisons, in order to protect the non-Muslim prisoners from the threat of conversion by force? If they did so, a constitutional challenge brought under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, claiming a violation of the Equal Protection Clause (which applies to the Federal government through the Due Process clause of the Fifth Amendment), would likely succeed, given that the highest level of review, Strict Scrutiny, would be triggered by the putative "religious" discrimination, and the government would have to meet the requirement of a "compelling state interest" that would justify such segregation. It's doubtful that such segregation, in order to prevent "forcible" conversions to Islam in prisons for security reasons, would constitute for this Court a "compelling state interest." For the government would have to explain those "security reasons," meaning it would have to admit what sensible people recognize to be true but are not allowed in this political

climate to publicly state: the more prison conversions, the more Muslims in our society; the more Muslims in our society, the more physically insecure life becomes for non-Muslims.

This leaves prison authorities in the U.S., as elsewhere in the West, with an ever-growing security threat of converts to Islam from among the most dangerous segments of society, and with the only measure likely to be effective in preventing convenience conversions – that is, segregation according to faith – impossible to undertake. That's the inconvenient truth. And Muslims, who watch as their numbers increase from yet one more variety of "adult-onset Islam," will have had the last laugh, the one provided them by Qur'an 2:256: "There shall be no compulsion in religion."

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