

Political or Spiritual Motives? Problems of Conversion of Iranian Refugees in Germany

by Dr Petra Uphoff

Why do Iranian Muslims convert to Christianity? According to Sharia apostates should be put to death. So why risk your life? In Iran one finds many converts from Islam being persecuted for their beliefs or the attempt to proselytize.

Conversion usually is regarded to be a very personal step taken out of conviction or a spiritual experience. But there seem to be other reasons, too: I just encountered a whole Iranian family openly admitting their conversion from Islam in order to get asylum in Germany. As converts are persecuted in Iran they expect that this should prevent them from being sent back.

Such acts have a range of consequences: church leaders in Germany (Iranian as well as others) know about these "casual-converts" and so do the public offices deciding over asylum. These "casual-converts" hereby aggravate the situation of those true believers risking their lives and well-being for their convictions. And church leaders have to decide about how to handle this - accepting or questioning these conversions: Should they be rating it as an opportunity to let the Holy Spirit work or should they just disregard it as a "fake conversion"?

And then you find those converts trying to combine Quran, Bible, Jesus as a "prophet and maybe-son-of-God", creating their own syncretical mix of compromises.

The question arises about possible approaches for churches, their members, workers and leaders: how to act in a "Christian" but on the same time "responsible and honest way". The other aspects are possible long term effects for "casual-converts" - in psychological and spiritual regards and concerning their family and society of origin.