

Statistics on Islam: Some True, Some False, Some Way False

Michael Jaffarian

Coordinator of Research for CBInternational, Richmond, Virginia, USA

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A missions pastor who attended a seminar I presented in Los Gatos, California e-mailed me a PDF of part of a brochure. It included some statistics that he asked me about, which I compared to facts from the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd edition. My reply:

Evidently the brochure is from Persian Ministries International. From their website, they look like a wonderful mission organization, with a good witness for Christ among Muslims.

As for the "facts" presented in their pamphlet:

"1. Islam has become the fastest growing religion in the world."

TRUE, SORT OF. Among the 10 largest religions in the world, Islam is the fastest-growing. Among the top 20, Baha'i is growing faster than Islam. Then again, there are religious movements within major religions that are larger than Baha'i and growing faster than Islam. For example: part of Hinduism, the category of Neo-Hindu religion (Sai Baba worship is one example), with 17 million adherents (Baha'i has 7 million), is growing faster than both Islam and Baha'i. The fastest-growing major religious movement in the world is Independent Christianity, if by 'major' one means 'with more than 18 million adherents'. Independent Christianity, with about 386 million adherents, is an ecclesiastical megabloc smaller than Roman Catholicism but larger than Protestantism, Orthodoxy, or Anglicanism.

Note also that the global growth of Islam is driven mainly by natural increase (births over deaths). Most predominantly-Muslim countries have high birth rates. Most predominantly-Christian countries have low birth rates. Only about 4% of the global growth of Islam is driven by conversion increase; for Christianity the figure is 10%. Far more non-Christians convert to Christianity each year than non-Muslims convert to Islam; probably more than 3 times as many.

"2. Islam is currently growing by 50 million people annually."

FALSE. Globally, the net growth of Islam is about 23 million people per year, with about 22 million coming by natural increase (births over deaths) and about 1 million by conversion growth (conversions over defections).

"3. One out of every 5 people in the world is a Muslim."

TRUE.

“4. By the year 2015, Islam will be the second largest religion in the United States.”

FALSE. Even by 2025, Islam will be only the 4th largest, after Christianity (then 261 million), Nonreligion (40 million), and Judaism (6.1 million). Islam is projected to have 5.9 million adherents in the USA by 2025.

“5. New Mosques have started in America at a faster rate than Christian Churches.”

MAYBE. Though Islam is less than 2% the size of Christianity in the USA (235.7 million vs. 4.1 million), it is growing at almost twice the rate. Almost all of Islam's growth in the USA, however, is driven by immigration; only some of it is by conversion. Those statistics pertain to the overall population growth of the 2 religions in the USA; I have not seen statistics specifically for the founding of new churches and new mosques. I assume the rate of growth of worship centers would somewhat parallel the rate of growth of religions.

“6. Since the 9/11 tragedy, more Americans have converted to Islam than at any other time in history.”

NO WAY. Not even close. Where on earth did this one come from? This is alarmist and ridiculous. The only time in American history when there have been significant conversions to Islam was in the late 1960s through the 1970s, when the Nation of Islam and other Black Muslim groups saw significant growth from among American Blacks.

Again, it seems to me that PMI is a good, viable ministry in many ways. Though I know very little about their work, from what I do know, I thank the Lord for them. Some other statements from their pamphlet:

"Muslims are not the oppressors, they are the oppressed; they are not the enemy, they are the lost."

A wonderful statement. If only more American Christians would see Muslims in this light! I heartily commend PMI for coining and using this slogan. Also:

"The acts of terrorism have resulted, and will continue to result, in greater receptivity to the gospel among Muslims."

Yes, for some Muslims. For some, this is a day of opportunity for gospel witness not to be missed. For many others, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have hardened their hearts even more against the USA and against the Christian faith that they, rightly or wrongly, associate with the USA.

... later ...

The above reply was copied to a leader of Persian Ministries International, and he responded very graciously to me:

“Thank you so much for your expertise in making the necessary corrections to the statistical information for our brochure. Apparently our sources, books from the current market, were not up to date. Your help was very significant to us.”

I asked for specifics, and he wrote:

“Thank you so much for helping us to be accurate. I got my information from several sources including the following books:

Unveiling Islam by Ergun & Amir Caner
Inside Islam by Reza Safa
Deceiving A Nation by Douglas Layton”