

## Craig Robertson, Ex-Catholic, Canada (part 1 of 2): From Bad to Worse

**Description:** After being raised in a Catholic household and spending much of his early childhood attending church, Craig rejects faith and takes to life in the fast lane.

By Craig Robertson

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My name is Abdullah Al-Kanadi. I was born in Vancouver, Canada. My family, who were Roman Catholics, raised me as a Roman Catholic until I was 12 years old. I have been Muslim for approximately six years, and I would like to share the story of my journey to Islam with you.



I suppose in any story it's best to start from the beginning. During my childhood I attended a Catholic religious school and was taught about the Catholic faith, along with other subjects. Religion was always my best class; I excelled academically in the teachings of the Church. I was pressed into service as an 'altar boy' by my parents from a very young age, which pleased my grandparents a great deal; but the more I learned about my religion, the more I questioned it! I have this memory from my childhood, I asked my mother on Mass: "Is our religion the right one?" My mother's answer still rings in my ears to this day: "Craig, they are all the same, they're all good!" Well to me this didn't seem right. What was the point of me learning my religion if they were all equally good!?

At the age of twelve, my maternal grandmother was diagnosed with colon cancer and died a few months later, after a painful battle with the disease. I never realized how deeply her death affected till later on in life. At the tender age of twelve, I decided I would be an atheist in order to punish God (if you can even fathom such a thing!) I was an angry little boy; I was angry at the world, at myself and worst of all, at God. I stumbled through my early teenage years trying to do everything I could to impress my new "friends" in public high school. I quickly realized that I had a lot to learn, for being sheltered in a religious school you don't learn what you would in a public school. I pressed all my friends in private to teach me about all the things I did not learn, soon enough I gained the habit of swearing and making fun of people weaker than me. Even though I tried my best to fit in, I never actually did. I would get bullied; girls would make fun of me and so on. For a kid my age, this was devastating. I retreated to myself, into what you would call an 'emotional shell'.

My teenage years were filled with misery and loneliness. My poor parents tried to talk to me, but I was belligerent towards them and very disrespectful. I graduated from high school in the summer of 1996 and felt that things would have to change for the better, since I believed they couldn't get any worse! I was accepted in a local technical school and decided that I should further my education and maybe make good money, so that I would be happy. I took a job at a fast-food restaurant by my house to help pay for school.

A couple of weeks before I was to start school, I was invited to move out with some friends from work. To me, this seemed like the answer to my problems! I would forget my family and be with my friends all the time. One night, I told my parents I was going to move out. They told me, I couldn't, and that I wasn't ready for it and that they wouldn't allow it! I was 17 years old and very headstrong; I swore at my parents and said to them all sorts of evil things, which I still regret to this day. I felt emboldened by my new freedom, I felt released, and I could follow my desires as I saw fit. I moved in with my friends and didn't speak to my parents for a long time after that.

I was working and going to school when my roommates introduced me to marijuana. I was in love with it after the first 'puff'! I would smoke a bit when I got home from work to relax and unwind. Soon though, I started to smoke more and more, until during one weekend I had smoked so much, that it was Monday morning and before I knew it, it was time for school. I thought, well, I'll take one day of school off, and go the next day, since they won't possibly miss me. I never returned to school after that. I finally realized how good I had it. All the fast food I could steal and all the drugs I could smoke, who needed school anyways?

I was living a great life, or so I thought; I became the 'resident' bad boy at work and consequently the girls started to pay attention to me like they hadn't in high school. I tried harder drugs, but *alhamdulillah*, I was saved from the really terrible stuff. The strange thing was, when I wasn't high or drunk I was miserable. I felt worthless and completely valueless. I was stealing from work and from friends to help maintain the 'chemical haze'. I became paranoid of the people around me and imagined police officers were chasing me around every corner. I was beginning to crack and I needed a solution, and I figured that religion would help me.

I remember seeing a movie about witchcraft and I thought that would be perfect for me. I bought a couple books on Wicca and Nature Worship, and found that they encouraged the use of natural drugs so I continued. People would ask me if I believed in God, and we would have the strangest conversations while under the 'influence', but I distinctly remember saying that no, in fact I don't believe in God at all, I believe in many gods as imperfect as me.

Through all this, there was one friend who stuck by me. He was a 'Born Again' Christian and was always preaching to me, even though I would mock his faith at every opportunity. He was the only friend I had at the time who didn't judge me, so when he invited me along to go to a youth weekend camp I decided to go along. I had no expectations. I thought I would have a huge laugh making fun of all the "Bible Thumpers". During the second evening, they had a huge service in an auditorium. They

played all sorts of music which praised God. I watched as the young and old, male and female cried out for forgiveness and shed tears over everything. I was really moved and I said a silent prayer along the lines of "God, I know I have been a horrible person, please help me, and forgive me and let me start fresh." I felt a surge of emotion come over me, and I felt tears roll down my cheek. I decided at that moment to embrace Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I raised my hands in the air and started dancing around (yes, dancing!) All the Christians around me were staring at me in stunned silence; the guy who mocked them and told them how stupid they were for believing in God, was dancing and praising God!

I returned to my party home and eschewed all drugs, intoxicants, and girls. I promptly told my friends how they needed to be Christians so they could be saved. I was shocked that they rejected me, because they always used to pay attention to me before. I ended up moving back with my parents after a long absence and used to badger them with the reasons why they should become Christian. They being Catholic felt they were already Christian, but I felt they were not, for they worshipped Saints. I decided to move out again but this time on better terms and was given a job by my grandfather who wanted to help with my "recovery".

I started to hang out at a Christian "youth house" which was basically a house where teens could go, to get away from family pressures and discuss Christianity. I was older than most of the boys, so I became one of those who talked most and try to make the boys feel welcomed. In spite of this, I felt like a fraud, for I started drinking and dating again. I would tell the kids about Jesus' love for them, and during the nights would drink. Through all this, my one Christian friend would try to council me and keep me on the right track.

## Craig Robertson, Ex-Catholic, Canada (part 2 of 2): Learning to Accept

**Description:** After finding his way back to Christianity, Craig is betrayed by his friends and again becomes lost, until his encounter with a Muslim at work.

By Craig Robertson

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I still remember to this day my first encounter with a Muslim. One of the boys brought his friend to the youth house. He was a Muslim kid whose name I forgot. What I do remember is the boy saying "I brought my friend 'so and so', he's a Muslim and I want to help him become a Christian". I was absolutely amazed by this 14 year old kid, he was calm and friendly! Believe it or not, he defended himself AND Islam against a dozen Christians who were hurling abuses at him and Islam! As we sat there fruitlessly

thumbing through our Bibles and getting angrier and angrier, he just sat there, quietly smiling and telling us about worshipping others besides God and how, yes, there is love in Islam. He was like a gazelle encircled by a dozen hyenas, yet the entire time, he was calm and friendly and respectful. It blew my mind!

The Muslim kid left a copy of the Quran on the shelf, either he forgot it or left it on purpose, I don't know, but I started reading it. I soon became infuriated with this book when I saw that it made more sense than the Bible. I threw it against the couch and walked away, seething with anger; yet, after I read it, I had a niggling doubt at my core. I did my best to forget about the Muslim kid and just enjoy my time with my friends at the youth house. The youth group used to go to various Churches on weekends to prayer events and Saturday nights were spent in a huge Church instead of at the bar. I remember being at one such event called 'The Well' and I felt so close to God and wanted to humble myself and show my Creator my love for Him. I did what felt natural, I prostrated. I prostrated like Muslims do in the daily prayers, yet I didn't know what I was doing, all I knew was, that it felt really good... it felt right, more than anything else I had ever done. I felt very pious and spiritual and continued on my path but as usual, started to feel things slipping away.

The Pastor always taught us that we must submit our will to God's, and I wanted nothing more than to do that; but I didn't know how! I always prayed "Please God, make my will Yours, make me follow Your will" and so on, but nothing ever happened. I felt myself slowly slipping away from the Church as my faith ebbed away. It was at this time that my best friend, the Christian man who had helped me come to Christ, along with another close friend of mine, raped my girlfriend who I had been with for two years. I was in the other room too drunk to know what was happening and unable to stop anything. A couple weeks later, it was revealed that the man who ran the youth house had molested one of the boys that I was friends with.

My world was shattered! I had been betrayed by so many of my friends, people who were supposed to be close to God and working towards Paradise. I had nothing left to give, I was empty again. I walked around as before, blindly and without direction, just working and sleeping and partying. My girlfriend and I broke up soon afterwards. My guilt, rage and sadness encompassed my entire being. How could my Creator allow such a thing to happen to me? How selfish was I?!

A little while after, my manager at work told me that a "Moslem" would be working with us, he was really religious and we should try to be decent around him. The minute this "Moslem" came in he started Da'wah. He wasted no time in telling us all about Islam and everyone told him they didn't want to hear anything about Islam, other than me! My soul was crying out and even my stubbornness could not squelch the cries. We started working together and discussing our respective beliefs. I had given up on Christianity completely, but when started asking me questions, my faith surged and I felt I was a 'Crusader' defending the Faith from this evil "Moslem".

The fact of the matter was that this particular "Moslem" wasn't evil like I had been told. In fact, he was better than me. He didn't swear, he never got angry and was always

calm, kind and respectful. I was truly impressed and decided that he would make an excellent Christian. We went back and forth asking things about each others religions, but after a time I felt myself getting more and more defensive. At one point, I became very angry... here I was trying to convince him of the truth of Christianity, and I felt it was he who was on the truth! I started to feel more and more confused and didn't know what to do. All I knew was that I had to increase my faith, so I jumped in my car and roared off to 'The Well'. I was convinced that if I could only pray there again, I could get the feeling back and the strong faith and then I could convert the Muslim. I eventually got there, after speeding the entire way, and found it was closed! No one was in sight, I frantically looked around for another similar event so I could 'charge up' but found nothing. Dejected, I returned home.

I started to realize that I was being pushed in a certain direction, so I prayed over and over to my Creator to surrender my will to His. I felt that my prayer was being answered; I went home and laid in bed and at that moment I realized that I needed to pray like never before. I sat up in bed and cried, *'Jesus, God, Buddha, whoever You are, please, please guide me, I need You! I have done so much evil in my life and I need Your help. If Christianity is the correct way then make me strong, and if it is Islam, then bring me to it!'* I stopped praying and the tears went away and deep within my soul I felt calm, I knew what the answer was. I went to work the next day and said to the Muslim brother "how do I say 'hi' to you?" He asked me what I meant and I said, "I wanted to become a Muslim". He looked at me and said "Allahu Akbar!" We hugged for a good minute or so and I thanked him for everything and I began my journey into Islam.

I look back at all the events that happened in my life over time, and I realize that I was being prepared to become a Muslim. I was shown so much mercy from God. Out of all that happened in my life, there was something to learn. I learned the beauty of the Islamic prohibition of intoxicants, the prohibition of illegal sex, and the need for the *Hijab*. I am finally on an even keel, no more am I too much in one direction; I am living a moderate life, and doing my best to be a decent Muslim.

There are always challenges, as I am sure many of you have felt, as have I. But through these challenges, through these emotional pains, we become stronger; we learn and, I hope, turn to God. For those of us who have accepted Islam at some point in our lives, we truly are blessed and fortunate. We have been given the chance, a chance for the greatest mercy! Mercy which we don't deserve, but still will God willing be given on the Day of Resurrection. I have reconciled with my family and have started looking to start my own God willing. Islam truly is a way of life, and even if we suffer poor treatment by fellow Muslims or non Muslims, we must always remember to be patient and turn only to God.

If I have said anything incorrect it is from me, and if anything that I have said is correct it is from God, all Praises are due to God, and may God bestow His mercy and blessings upon his noble Prophet Muhammad, *Amen*.

May God increase our faith and make it in accords to that which pleases Him and grant us His Paradise, *Amen!*

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