

ANGELENE MCLAREN, EX-CATHOLIC, USA

Rating: 4.9

Description: Detroit-based African American journalist and PR woman, Angelene McLaren, has been a Muslim for six years. Upon conversion she took the new name Sumayyah bint Joan. Here she records her encounter with Islam.

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Ever since I was a little girl, I've always had a profound relationship with God. Even though I was raised a Catholic, with all its ambiguities, contradictions and confusion, I did my best to stay God-focused and not to give in to the teachings of the Church, because even to me as a child, they seemed to go against the 'grain' somehow. During my high school days, I made a conscious decision to apply myself more thoroughly to my faith. I attended mass twice a day, every day, went to the confessional at least once a week, and did all the ritual practices my priest insisted upon; all in an effort to draw closer to a God. The church failed to answer all of life's pressing questions; who am I, who and what is God, why am I here, and what should be my relationship with this superior being who created the universe? How am I supposed to live my life? Who is my role model, and how should I follow him or her? Why does God need to have a son now, when He was alone in the creation of all that is, and need no partner or intercessor before? My priest was unable to answer my questions, beyond stating that I should have faith, and that it did not all have to make sense as long as my faith was strong enough. This did not satisfy me, and on finishing high school, I left the church and set out on a quest to find the correct way, belief and religion.

I investigated a number of religions in an effort to get rid of this internal emptiness. I practiced Hinduism, Taoism, Zen Buddhism, and in later years even dabbled in White Witchcraft. Now, most people may find this crazy, but you have to understand that I was searching, truly searching, but all these left a void, and just never seemed to fit. Then one day my sister came to see me and what I saw took me by surprise. She entered the house with a very long dress and was covered from head to toe. Her hair was covered by an opaque scarf and came over her breasts to right above her waist. After asking her why she was dressed like that in the middle of summer when it's at least 85 degrees outside, she explained to me that she was a Muslim.

Now of all the religions I looked into, I never thought of investigating Islam, mainly because there didn't seem to be a lot of information readily available, and because I carried a lot of the Islamic stereotypes in my head, that I now have to deal with in other people. So I left my family and moved to California, still without a religion, or a sound

relationship with God.

In the beginning a lot of stereotypes about Islam kept me from studying about this religion

At that point I gave up, and just decided to go with the flow, and not worry about it. I did this for two years, and although I found love and got engaged to marry to my college sweetheart; something was still missing. In the back of my mind, there was always that nagging voice that kept telling me that my life was out of order, but I would do my best to ignore it, until one fateful night. Right before I was due to leave California, and return to my home state to be with my fiancé and begin building our lives together, I had the scariest dream I've ever had in my life.

In this dream, two very tall men dressed in white were standing at the foot of my bed. As I looked at them, I thought they were either aliens or angels, I wasn't sure which, but I was very afraid and was trying my utmost to get away from them, but the harder I tried to get away, the closer to them I got. Eventually, we ended up on top of a very high mountain, with a sea beneath us as red as blood and as hot as lava. The two men pointed and instructed me to look into the sea. What I saw will stay with me until the day I die. The sea was full of naked people, being turned over and over, like meat being roasted over a fire, and they were screaming, "Help us, help us!" Needless to say, I felt I was getting a first-hand glimpse of Hell, and I was terrified. I told my fiancé about the dream, and he just laughed and said that I had an overactive imagination, but I couldn't dismiss it so easily.

When I returned to Michigan, I found out that my other sister, and my cousin had also embraced Islam during my absence. This made me curious, so I asked my sister to give me some books to read, and one of the first was, Descriptions of the Hell Fire. Everything that was in my dream was in this book. I was floored. So I began reading and reading, and going to lectures and asking questions, and the more I learned about Islam, the more my head and heart told me that this was what I was looking for all along. I had made up my mind to embrace Islam, but I had one small problem, my fiancé. He was adamant that he was not going to be a Muslim, so I had to choose between the man I loved, and doing what I knew in my heart was right.

God says that if you say you truly believe in Him and His Messenger, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, He will test you, and this was my test. Despite the great amount of pain it caused me at the time, I did choose Islam over my fiancé. That was almost six years ago, and God has since blessed me with a wonderful husband who loves Allah and His Messenger, and a beautiful son. God says for all who truly want guidance, He will lead them from darkness into light; and I know that is what He did for me.

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