

Anja, Ex-Christian, Germany (part 1 of 4)

Description: Over a period of two and a half years, this university student grew to take Islam very seriously. Part 1.

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**"... This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion..."
(Quran 5:3)**

I was born 1967 in a small town in Sauerland County, Germany. My younger brother and I grew up in the country, where my parents and grandparents lived in a two-family house. My grandfather used to be principal of a primary school. My father would have liked to become a forester, but instead he only became a teacher in secondary school. He still does love nature very much. But throughout the years he seems to have lost His love for Jesus Christ, which was quite disappointing for my grandmother, who has always been a firm believer. She was a member of a small church and all her life she participated actively in the church and tried hard to set a true Christian example for her children. My grandfather on the other hand could hardly be called a believer; this was something that my grandmother only found out after the wedding. Steady church attendance turned out to be no proof of faith. Till today after each church service my grandparents engage in heated discussions about Christian belief in general and the contents of the last sermon in particular. This situation did affect their three sons. Today only one of them is a church member.

My mother on the other side comes from a family, where devotion to faith was key. Belief was never subject to discussion. Actually nothing ever was subject to discussion. My mother, being the youngest child, was never taken seriously. What else could be the use of a daughter? Till this day she regrets that she wasn't allowed to learn another profession. And again it was taken for granted, that my mother was to marry my father. Since he was the son of a teacher he was a good match. The shared faith would guarantee a happy marriage.

But during the first years the marriage became unstable due to religions tensions. While my grandmother was elected as first woman into the church's council of elders, my parents one at a time left the church. And there came a day, when they didn't have anything in common anymore. So after 20 years of marriage and uncountable tries to get along, both agreed on throwing in the towel and in 1986 their marriage was dissolved.

At that time my brother and I weren't too attached to religion, which added to my grandmother's dismay. We did join Christian Youth groups and take Bible classes, but neither of us became church members. Actually we haven't even been baptized. The church my family belonged to doesn't baptize children, but rather grown up people, who

consciously make a decision for Christ. When we reached necessary age, we both decided against being baptized.

Not that I wouldn't have been interested in religion. Religion always fascinated me. Christianity offers an acceptable approach, the belief in one God, who contacted mankind by sending prophets. In this way God taught the people who they are and how they should interact with each other and their environment. But I was soon to notice that Christian values could so easily be adjusted. What does Christian theology teach? Every human being is full of sin; original sin is burdening us from birth. God sent His son into the world to suffer and die on the cross and save us from this burden of guilt. A number of questions remained unanswered for me; God's son, who was supposed to be a man and at the same time the true God, was praying to be saved from the crucifixion, but to whom did he pray so ardently? His life became the turning point of history, which divides people in "before" and "after" Christ. Belief in him is the only way to be saved. Didn't he say himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father but through me." (John 14, 6)

With Jesus' death the Hereafter lost its terror. Christianity preaches that God is Love, so how can there be a Hell? The devil, who used to be a mean of oppression to keep church members in order, has been pensioned. The values of contemporary Christianity are pretty much limited to "Love your Neighbor". As long as I don't hurt anybody, everything goes. Jesus says: "You shouldn't think, I have come to dissolve the law or the prophets. I didn't come to dissolve, but to fulfill." (Matthew 5:17) The difference doesn't seem to be too big in modern Christianity. Commandments are out. Church goes with time. Though not fast enough for some of its members.

The Bible hardly has any weight anymore. Probably some truth can be found in it, but who decides on what is truth and what isn't? Who decides, what is valid and what isn't? The church? The theologians? Or everybody for himself? Doesn't everybody according to best knowledge and conscience fabricate his own belief? Let's be truthful and no longer call the result Christianity. Let's call it "Brianity", "Susanity" instead!

Believing Christians will of course protest by now. They will say, the common basis is there. Well, where is it? The true revelation, the words God told Jesus from Nazareth, where are they? In the Bible there wasn't even one chapter dedicated to them.

Central sentences of Faith, that divide the church, have been derived from historical reports and letters, decided on during theological conferences or just called out as State doctrine. And how many times did I hear: "You can't understand this. You just have to believe it!" I believe that God gave us our brains so that we might use them. And I believe, that a message of God, when it is questioned, has to offer more answers than that.

That's what I told my religious instructor, when my high school class spent a weekend in a monastery shortly before graduation. "Days of reflection" that's what they called it. The teacher surprised me with his answer. He said: "God won't let you go. You'll see." At the end he turned out to be right, though he probably may have imagined it a little differently.

My interest in God and religion again caught up with me, when I came across Islam. After taking my high school diploma I moved to a city, to take up studies of economy at the university. At that time I thought that this field of study would do me good in terms of finding a job. I wasn't too interested in the subject, but I thought, that my studies would come to pass very quickly, but instead I was subjected to a very depressing atmosphere. Crowded stuffy audition rooms, boring lectures by boring professors. As students in these classes, we were busy with other things. "Did you see what the tall blonde in the third row is wearing today?" - "Do you have a light?"

Student life on the other hand was fascinating from the very beginning. I had till that point in time lived in a small town. Even during my year as an exchange student in the U.S.A. I stayed in a small country town that made it obligatory to visit the church on Sundays! Now at university there seemed to be a new world opening up for me. I got to know so many different people and I loved to discuss God and the world. Among my new acquaintances were a few foreign students, who were born Muslims. So the subject of Islam came up.

Generally I was quite amused by the thought, that actually there are still people around, who seriously follow a law from the Middle Ages. But in reality everything looked quite different from what I knew. The life of foreign students in Germany doesn't have anything in common with the tales of a *Thousand and One Nights*. In the beginning I had still asked my Muslim neighbors in the student homes kiddingly, why tomatoes don't have to be ritually cut? Or why a Muslim, who remembers God before he eats and thanks God after the meal, doesn't do the same thing when drinking his beer in the pub?

But the more I learned about Islam, the less funny those jokes became for me. Actually the Islamic religion wasn't that strange to me, as I had always thought. I rediscovered a lot of those components that I had always liked in Christianity. For one, of course, was the belief in God. Islam is strictly monotheistic. There is only one God. God is in Arabic "Allah". The expression really doesn't mean anything else but "the God" and is also used in the Arabic language version of the Bible.

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