

Hussein Abdulwaheed Amin, Ex-Catholic, Ireland (part 1 of 4): Introduction and Personal Background

Description: An Irish Catholic who has lived in some Muslim countries decides to research Islam due to a relationship with a Muslim woman and discusses what he finds.

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Introduction

I have written my story of conversion to Islam mainly for the benefit of other (would-be) western converts, especially those who, like myself, come from a genuinely religious Christian background. Whilst Christianity and Islam have much in common, there remain fundamental differences about which no compromise is possible, principally concerning the Christian doctrine of Trinity and the belief that Jesus is divine. Moving from being a practicing, sincere, if somewhat intellectually dissatisfied Christian to embracing Islam is therefore in some respects a major theological journey. As someone who has already undertaken that journey, I hope that my travelogue may in some way help smooth the path of those who follow. The following hadeeth (saying of Prophet Mohammed) comes to mind:

"Once a man, who was passing through a road, found a branch of a tree with thorns obstructing it. The man removed the thorns from the way. God thanked him and forgave his sins." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Through detailing my own experiences for the benefit of others of a similar background, I would like to think of myself as removing some of the figurative thorns which obstruct the road from Christianity to Islam.

I converted to Islam before I became Internet-aware and had to do all the research for myself. It was essential to me that my investigation of Islam result in intellectual and theological satisfaction. I trust that others from a similar background to mine will find that some of my experiences along the path from Christianity to Islam serve as useful pointers and starting points for investigation in their own spiritual quest.

My Personal Background

I converted to Islam in October 1998 when aged 31. I am originally from Ireland where I was born into a practicing Catholic family, but I have spent nearly all my adult life abroad. In the mid to late 1990's I was in love with a Muslim lady whom I had met whilst in an Islamic country. I knew that if I were interested in marrying her, I would have to convert to Islam, as Muslim women are prohibited from marrying outside their faith. I did not at all welcome the prospect of having to become a Muslim. In fact,

although I knew very little about Islam the religion, a particularly negative experience I had just had of working in a different Muslim country had, if anything, rather soured my opinion of things to do with Islam and reinforced whatever general western disinclinations I may already have felt. Nevertheless back in Europe during the spring and summer of 1998, I read all the text books I could find in college and public libraries about Islam (factual accounts, textbooks, mainly by non-Muslims) and discovered, somewhat to my surprise, that I could agree with 90% of the religion without any difficulty. I actually became rather enthusiastic. I realized that I had been making the mistake of judging Islam by the behavior of some of its more unsavory nominal adherents rather than by the theological and moral teachings of the religion itself.

Jesus - Son of God?

Where I did have a real problem, though, was with the role of Jesus. I had been brought up a Catholic Christian, believing in the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Jesus the Son plus the Holy Spirit - three persons in one god. Islam rejects this and teaches the absolute oneness of God (Tawheed) and specifically that Jesus, though a great prophet, was only human and not divine.

"O People of the Book [Christians and Jews]! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His messengers. Say not "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son." (Quran 4:171)

"Christ the son of Mary was no more than a messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food." (Quran 5:75)

"[Jesus] said: Surely I am a servant of God; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet." (Quran 19:30)

"In blasphemy indeed are those that say that God is Christ the son of Mary." (Quran 5:17)

"They do blaspheme who say: 'God is Christ the son of Mary.' But said Christ: "O Children of Israel! worship God, my Lord and your Lord.'" (Quran 5:72)

"And behold! God will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?' He will say: 'Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say).'" (Quran 5:116)

Islam preaches pure monotheism. The absolute fundamental of Islam is that God alone (what Christians refer to as God the Father) is the sole deity. Surah 112 of the

Quran is quite explicit about this:

- 1. Say (O Muhammad): "He is Allah, (the) One.**
- 2. "The Self-Sufficient Master.**
- 3. "He begets not, nor was He begotten;**
- 4. "And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him."**

What was I to do? This was so alien to me. I certainly could not betray Jesus.

In terms of religious belief and practice, my own personal situation was that I had mainly ceased going to Sunday Mass for some years, in large part due to annoyance at the political, non-religious content of many Sunday sermons. (I much preferred the short, non-obligatory, weekday Masses where I could concentrate without distraction or annoyance on feeling close to God, as no sermon is preached.) Yet on a theological level I remained a committed Catholic (as opposed to Protestant) within the context of Christianity. For example, within the ring fence of Christianity, based on my study of the Gospels, I believed in the doctrines of transubstantiation and apostolic succession. However, I had serious doubts about the validity of Christianity per se, specifically with the doctrine of Original Sin and the consequential need for the blood sacrifice of Jesus, Son of God, as a spiritual redeemer of souls in atonement. Both these concepts are unknown and alien to the Judaism from which Christianity is supposed to be derived. Nevertheless the notion of Jesus as Son of God, had been so deeply ingrained in me that it was extremely difficult for me to countenance any other interpretation.

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