

Stephanie, Ex-Catholic, South Africa (part 4 of 6)

Description: She finally then embraced Islam.

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13 February 2011: *I have been raised so long with this fundamentalist Christian mentality that is afraid of other religions; that if I explored them I would upset God. And I am so terrified of what my mom would think. **Even though she remarked a few years back in the shopping mall: "You should have been born a Muslim," she said the other day when I told her of my interest in Eastern prayer: "Just as long as you don't become Mohammedan!" I thought: "Oh, God, Mom, guess what... I like Islam!"** I ended up saying something like this to her - that my choice of religion is my issue, not hers.*

*When I think back on why I loved the cloistered life of a nun, and what I loved in Catholicism, I see in Islam all these things, especially the oneness, that's why it draws me. **It is the religion that is probably closest to my own outlook of life.** I have to explore it, otherwise it will keep on coming back more intensely. I feel that if I explore it, it may lose fascination for me and I can return to Christianity. **Part of me wants to convert, part of me is TERRIFIED. "What if I go to Hell?" is my worst concern. And yet, I felt that same fear in coming to Catholicism.** This evening I burst into tears as I am so torn up about the whole thing. I have been researching about Islam a lot recently and reading stories of conversions and I even tuned my radio to the Muslim station. **I said to God how part of me hates Islam for interesting me, and sure, it is a love-hate relationship.** I have to learn to live with my interest. But as I said I am afraid of offending God - and what does Jesus think? I feel like a hypocrite at Mass, but I still go.*

14 February 2011: *I am often too afraid to tell Christian loved ones of my interest in Islam for fear that they will say I am going down the wrong path away from the truth and will harm my soul. I find Islam to be a very stark, simple, strong and austere [religion], unlike Catholicism which is more complex and even somewhat sentimental at times.*

Many things - their set prayers where they prostrate, their simplicity, their separation of men and women in worship, praying barefoot, their WONDERFUL emphasis on modesty and the veil, their view of women (I have considered myself a bitter anti-Feminist, but when I see Feminism through Islamic glasses, I actually make peace with it, because women don't compromise their modesty and femininity). I also love their Ramadan fasting, the pilgrimage they do, the cleanliness of ritual washing, their abstinence from alcohol, their dislike for dating - preferring chaperoned and chaste meetings between men and women, arranged marriages, and so on.

When I look back on my life, I seemed to be Muslim the way I kept myself. *I hardly ever dated - I met my two boyfriends at my house or theirs, or went out with them along with another friend or my parents, etc. From 17 I dressed modestly and loved covering my head, I was never*

partial to alcohol, I liked the challenge of fasting and set prayers (hence my past love for the cloistered life).

It is not that I wanted to reject Christianity, but I found something which I feel I could identify more with, belong in.

Coming to Islam

By then I couldn't resist it anymore and did loads of research, reading lots of conversion stories of women, and I began to believe it was possible to let go and let God lead me. As my heart was already long won over, all I had to do was convince my mind... So I read internet articles and the English translation of the Quran, I began to pray in the Muslim way, doing Isha at first, using a little mat to pray on, and doing wudhu (ritual ablution) the prescribed way. It was hard to win my mind over, but I prayed to Almighty God, Most gracious and Merciful, that He guided me. I asked Him for a breakthrough and the next day I read some articles

Nothing seemed to hit me smack bang in the head, until I read an article on www.defending-islam.com called "The Miracle of the Quran" by Khalid Baig. He said the following:

*"Prominent scholar Dr. Hamidullah tells of an effort in Germany by the Christian scholars to gather all the Greek manuscripts of Bible as the original Bible in Aramaic is extinct. They gathered all manuscripts in the world and after examining them reported: **"Some two hundred thousand contradictory narrations have been found... of these one-eighth are of an important nature."** When the report was published, some people established an Institute for Quranic Research in Munich with the goal of examining Quran the same way. By 1933, 43000 photocopies of Quranic manuscripts had been collected. While some minor mistakes of calligraphy were found, **not a single discrepancy in the text had been discovered!**"*

Wow, wow, WOW!!!... It really IS a miracle! How could it be otherwise possible??? I was so impressed that there was only one version of the Quran. As a Protestant Christian I had searched for the most genuine Bible and took the King James Version as it was "authorised". Then when I became Catholic I realised it wasn't the most original. I bought a New Revised Standard Version Bible, but looked to the Douay-Rheims version as the most authentic, as it was based on St. Jerome's Vulgate - the closest I could get to the early Bible. Unfortunately it was too expensive to buy. I loved the Jerusalem Bible as well, which was used in the Liturgy, but then there were two versions of that, too! It was so confusing! But with the Quran, besides there being various language translations, there is only one version - the original Arabic - and not only that, but every Muslim has access to learning to read Arabic, and can benefit from the true version. A far cry from the Christian history when the Bible was read only by some people, mostly priests, who could have easily taught the people their own opinions instead.

It was then that I decided to submit myself to God. How happy I was! Not only that, but Islam's views on women put an end to my struggles in the Catholic Church. I could reconcile the good things in Feminism with modesty and the veil. At last, I found a

niche! My bitterness dissolved like dew in the sun.

This had happened shortly after another event - after all the years struggling to discern a vocation to a convent, I decided it was about time I got a proper job so I could eventually move out of my parents' home and become independent - and with the way things were moving, it was now essential! I mentioned in a letter above (March, 2nd, 2010) that I regularly went to a fabric shop for my sewing needs, as I knew the owners well by this time, (and because they were Muslim!) I decided to ask for a part-time job there. The next week I popped in to buy some dress trimming as an excuse to ask about the job and share my interest in Islam. When I purchased the trimmings, I got into a conversation about Islam with a wonderful lady working there, who gave me her sister's contact number. Her sister knew someone who worked in a Madrassah (Muslim School) and who would be willing to teach me. To my joy, I got the job, (however I was retrenched soon afterwards). Then the lady did something which touched me deeply - she said to the man that they mustn't greet me with "hello" anymore, but "Salaam Aleikum!" (peace be upon you) I then replied: "Wa Aleikum Assalaam! (and peace be upon you too)!".

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