

James Den C. Bedico, Ex-Christian, Philippines



I was Mr. James Den C. Bedico now I am Mr. Afraz Saleem C. Bedico, a former member of the Iglesia Ni Cristo or Church of Christ in the Republic of the Philippines.

The Iglesia Ni Cristo is one of the most influential and the second largest Christian group here in the Philippines next to the Roman Catholic. I was born, raised, and baptized inside the Iglesia Ni Cristo since my parents, brother and sister, and most of my relatives are dedicated members of the Iglesia Ni Cristo.

During my early childhood, I was very active in every religious activity of the Iglesia Ni Cristo and I regularly went to church every Thursday and Sunday. I never missed a congregational service except in cases of extreme illness. I was part of the choir and my parents still hold key positions in the Church, such as deacon and deaconess. I studied college in a school owned by the Iglesia Ni Cristo, all its students are members of the church. In total, I spent thirty years of my life being an Iglesia Ni Cristo worshipper. I never had the chance of listening to the teachings of other religions.

In relation to Islam, I was never interested to learn about it, this was partly on account of the minority status Muslims hold in the Philippines. I would usually see them while going home; they seemed to be members of a tribe, a blood lineage, or a group of natives living in the isolated islands of the Philippines. I never thought that they had a religion! I never heard the word “Islam” during my childhood, or it could have been that I never gave attention to that word. Basically Islam here in the Philippines is a forgotten religion. The Philippines is a Christian dominated society, especially in the northern and central parts of the country. In the southernmost part, Muslims are quite dominant. This is because they are adjacent or near to Malaysia, a Muslim country in southeast Asia.

As the years passed by, I was drifting away from my religion, I felt ‘empty’, as though yearning for something. Then in the beginning of 2012, I had a strange dream about a Muslim child wearing a hijab (veil) covering all of her body except

her eyes. The child would be about 6 years old. She was looking at me at a distance of about 5 ft from where I was standing and then she uttered the words: “Assalamu Alaikum!” I woke up, shocked and confused...why would I have such a dream?

After dreaming about the Muslim child, I searched about Muslims online. I typed in the word “Islam” and one of the websites that came up was www.islamreligion.com. I visited the site and I was amazed because I never thought that Islam was a religion, and that it preached the ONENESS OF GOD. It was from this moment that I became very interested in Islam. My interest perked further when I read an article about God. It stated that He had no partner or son! This doctrine was similar to my former religion, but there was a significant difference. From the fundamental beliefs that we were taught is that Christ is the son of GOD. So, I thought to myself that if my former religion teaches us that there is only one GOD and that Jesus Christ is the son of GOD, then it would be possible for GOD to multiply himself by having another son. This process could continue until there would be numerous gods who would help the ONE GOD on his tasks as a GOD. It was on account of this that I lost faith in my former religion and I began to dig deeper into the Islamic faith.

I constantly visited www.islamreligion.com and read some enlightening articles about Islam. I was so amazed with the method of the Muslims’ prayers. It was quite evident to me that these prayers were more holistic, sincere, humble, and submissive to GOD ALMIGHTY, especially when Muslims perform the *ruku* or bowing (bowing is a sign of respect to a MASTER) and then the *sajdah* or the prostration. There is so much respect in the prayers performed by Muslims. I wondered why in my former religion, during prayers why we would just stand and fiddle with our hands, this causes so much distraction!

In my mind, I began to see the beauty of the Islamic teachings. I thought if we bow to a person it shows so much respect to that individual, so why shouldn’t we bow to ALMIGHTY GOD? When a gun is pointed at us, we prostrate before the person begging for his mercy, so why shouldn’t we prostrate to ALMIGHTY GOD WHO IS capable of causing our death and capable of putting our souls in Hell?

I realized that Islam is a religion that calls for worshipping GOD with great respect through sincere prayers, solid faith, and strong belief.

Another reason why I embraced Islam is the life of Prophet Muhammad (may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him). I was amazed to see how Muslims took good care of their Prophet (may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him) right up to his last breath and how the Prophet fought for the ONENESS OF GOD and the Muslim’s struggle to spread the message of God.

This is the essence of Islam, we firmly believe in the ONENESS OF GOD and we respect the Messenger of GOD: Prophet Muhammad (may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him).

Now, as a Muslim, my actions are more refined. I am more GOD-fearing and GOD-conscious. I always remember GOD by praying regularly, I remember Him in everything I do through supplications and remember Him by repenting to Him when I commit sins. These are all the pleasant changes of my life. I enjoy my religion and I am very happy that I embraced Islam as my new religion. I am very happy that I am now legally converted into Islam here in the Philippines and I am now using my Muslim name Afraz Saleem C. Bedico. I thank the website's operator Samy for assisting me in pronouncing the *shahadah* (Testimony of Faith) and I thank the website's operator Tariq for answering my questions during the Live-Chat sessions, and I thank www.Islamreligion.com for being a guide to those who do not know the right path.

ALHAMDULILLAH (All praise and thanks are due to God) for guiding me to the right path.