

## Martin Guevarra Abella, Ex-Catholic, Philippines



I am Martin Guevarra Abella. I was born in Manila, Philippines in 1966 to Catholic parents. I was baptized a Catholic when I was two weeks old! My family rarely missed Sunday mass and we never failed to observe different Christian, or shall I say “Catholic” activities like Christmas, All Saint’s Day, Holy Week/Easter, etc. By the time I was 12, I was a devout Catholic. I even attended masses devoted to the “Virgin Mary” on Wednesdays and prayed the “rosary” daily.

I was deeply interested in religion and read the Bible cover to cover but it never strengthened my Catholic faith and instead only rocked my faith. I started questioning Catholic practices of worshipping/praying to graven images and having one God with three personas? I mean, how can  $1=3$ ? I questioned the different sacraments of the Catholic Church like baptism, wedding and mass, for all were completed with their due “fee” Even prayers for the dead and blessings for the dead with a sprinkling of “holy water” were not exempted.

I turned to my distant relatives who are priests and nuns and I questioned them about these matters whenever I had the opportunity. They could not answer my questions and I could see from their eyes that they just simply dismissed me as a “Catholic who sings a different tune, a thorn in the side of an established order.”

I questioned the doctrine of limbo regarding the status of unbaptized infants/individuals who die without being freed from “Original Sin” (as Catholics believe). Medical personnel can baptize patients who are in critical condition (near death) and this was believed to be sufficient if the patient/individual dies. But if the patient survives, he still needs to go to a priest for baptism! Now this did not make sense, how would this be considered in one instance, ‘sufficient’ and in another insufficient?

Relatives of the dead who are rich can offer unlimited masses to remove the souls of their loved ones in “Purgatory” (an invention of the Catholic Church) of course for a hefty fee, again, paid to the Church. This made it possible for the rich

to buy his/her way to “Heaven” while the “poor” souls whose relatives cannot afford to pay, is sure to rot in purgatory or much worse go straight to Hell. Even the tolling of church bells to announce the death of someone in the community has a related fee.

When I got married at age 21 and had a family of my own, I ceased to be a Catholic. I stopped attending masses. I began my search for the true religion as I no longer believed in the Catholic faith. This led me to study the faith of those who profess to be Protestant Christians - who believe that mere acceptance of Jesus as your personal Savior will lead you to salvation. Protestants believe that “faith alone” is necessary for salvation. I find that odd. Sorry, but I thought that this must be the religion of those too “lazy” to do good deeds for the pleasure of God!

I then studied the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses who insist that God’s name is Jehovah, despite admitting themselves that Yahweh must be the more proper name of God as there are no vowels in the Hebrew language!

I also became a member of the Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC).<sup>[1]</sup> Again, I had many questions regarding their practices inside the INC that made me continue my search for the true religion.

It was during my work in the island of Mindanao for two years, specifically, Cotabato City in the late 1980s that I first came into contact with Islam; although, I didn’t get a chance to study Islam, this exposure would later draw me to Islam.

Christians see our Muslims brothers as troublemakers, polygamous terrorists, murderers, kidnappers, drug traders, suicide bombers such that there is really a well-known saying “A good Muslim is a dead Muslim” Being a Muslim during this stage in my life was the last thing on my mind, for I believed that there must be an intermediary between God and man (due to my two decades of struggling in Christianity) and that religion should not foster violence (though I am also aware of the history of Catholic inquisition).

All in all, it took me more than two decades or 23 years to be exact, when I stopped using the Bible as a standard of measure of what I consider should be the true religion. I began reading the Holy Quran and made countless searches on the web to satisfy my curiosity. The deepest questions in my mind were answered one-by-one when I learned of this site, IslamReligion.com. There are many helpful articles readily accessible for one searching for the truth. A seeker of the truth must be very careful when searching online, there are many sites that propagate lies, twist facts or try to deviate from the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him.

With God's mercy, my eyes were opened. My zeal to search for the truth was further awakened. I realized a very important lesson, not every Muslim upholds Islam as they should; so it isn't fair to judge Islam based on what Muslims do.

I learned that Islam is a religion of peace and that violence is farthest from the mind of a true Muslim. I learned the six pillars of faith and the basic beliefs and practices in Islam. I had the conviction of finally saying the Shahada (The Testimony of Faith) and enter the fold of Islam.

Life is not just being born, studying worldly knowledge in some university, earning money to spend for one's needs, and then old age, sickness and eventually death. For if this was the meaning of life, then life would truly be miserable because "even if you win the rat race, you still remain just a miserable rat."

Without embracing Islam and spending one's life purely for the pleasure of God life will remain meaningless and full of troubles.

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**Footnotes:**

[1] ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iglesia\\_ni\\_Cristo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iglesia_ni_Cristo))