

## Hussain Abd al-Wahed Amin, Ex-Catholic, Ireland

### (part 1 of 4): Introduction and Personal Background



#### 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.

**(part 2 of 4): Investigating the Christian Resources**

## **Saint Paul and the early Christian Church**

Having gone as far as I could at that time with my research of Islam, I next set about a serious study of the historical Jesus and the early Christian church. I was astonished at what I learned - things I had never even heard about in my fourteen years of Religious Education at Catholic schools. As my knowledge increased, I came to reject what I now regarded as the doctrinal innovations of the foremost evangelist of the early church, Paul of Tarsus, usually referred to as Saint Paul the Apostle. Paul was not an Apostle at all. In fact, he personally never even met Jesus, yet claimed to receive visions of Jesus which overrode the first-hand historical and theological knowledge of those who had known and followed Jesus during his actual ministry. Paul's abrogation of the Law of Moses was decried by the Jerusalem church, led by Peter, and comprised of the original Jewish disciples of Jesus. They saw themselves as a movement within Judaism and would not accept gentiles unless they converted to Judaism, for example, through circumcision and acceptance of Jewish dietary law. For the original Jewish disciples of Jesus, the notion of a literal and physical Son of God would have been blasphemous and in direct contravention of the First Commandment. In Exodus 20:2-5 we read:

**“I am the Lord your God...Worship no god but me...I tolerate no rivals.”**

And Deuteronomy 6:4 is variously rendered as:

**“Hear O Israel, the LORD - and the LORD alone - is our God.”**

Or

**“The LORD, our God, is the only God.”**

Or

**“The LORD our God is one.”**

There seems no scope for a “Son of God” or Trinity based on those readings, only for God “the Father” in Christian parlance or Allah as He is known to Muslims. [Allah is simply the Arabic word for the God (capital G). He is not some other deity, as some people in the West mistakenly think. Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians use the word “Allah” too and “Allah” appears throughout the Arabic Bible.]

This understanding that a literal, physical Son of God would have been (and still is) blasphemous to Jews was subsequently confirmed to me in private correspondence with a Jewish university professor of religion. Speaking of the Jewish understanding of the Messiah, he stated: “The figure described here is clearly a human being, not a divinity or son of God”.

Saint Paul’s missionary work was overwhelmingly directed at polytheist pagans in the northern Mediterranean. In Corinth he gave up in exasperation on the Jews who stayed faithful to the worship of God alone and to the oneness of God. In Acts 17: 6 Paul declares to the Jews:

**“If you are lost, you yourselves must take the blame for it. I am not responsible. From now on I will go to the gentiles.”**

The notion of gods having children would have been very familiar to gentiles such as the Greeks. I suspect that Paul distorted the message of Jesus to make it more acceptable to this audience and thereby gain as many converts as possible as quickly as possible. We see evidence in Acts 17: 22-23 of how Paul in Athens draws explicitly on the existing religion of the Greeks to introduce his corrupted version of Christianity to them. There is also evidence that Paul made things up as he went along and conjured up doctrine on the hoof without reference to Jewish scripture, the teachings of Jesus or even one of his own famed visions. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7: 25 in reply to a query about unmarried people, Paul admits that “I do not have a command from the Lord”, yet nevertheless proceeds to offer his own private opinion in his self-proclaimed capacity as “one who by the Lord’s mercy is worthy of trust”.

## **The Questionable Validity of the New Testament**

Growing up in a Catholic home and attending Catholic schools, I had always unquestioningly regarded the Bible as the Word of God. As a result of my private study in adulthood of the history of the writing and compilation of the Bible, I now came to view the New Testament in particular as deeply suspect. Paul or his followers wrote most of it. Note, for example, that from chapter 16 onwards, the Acts of the Apostles follows the career of Paul, not his co-missionary Barnabas, an original disciple of Jesus. Barnabas was acknowledged as the founder of the Christian Church in Cyprus and was the author of a Gospel which was accepted by the earliest Christians. But his Gospel was arbitrarily excluded from the Bible when the New Testament was officially compiled for the first time at the behest of the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine three centuries after Christ. Barnabas had originally vouched for Paul when the Jerusalem disciples of Jesus wanted nothing to do with him, but then parted company with Paul after a bitter argument (Acts 15: 36-40).

As for the four Gospels now accepted as canonical by Christendom (and only since as late as the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E.!), these were compiled from unreliable third and fourth-hand accounts long after Jesus' lifetime.

Mark 65-75 C.E.

Luke 80-85 C.E.

Matthew 85-90 C.E.

John 95-140 C.E.

Source: University of Calgary, Department of Religious Studies<sup>[1]</sup>

How can the true Word of God contain two glaringly different genealogies of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-37)? And why include human genealogies at all if Jesus were truly the literal or physical "Son of God"? How many thousands did Jesus really feed with loaves and fish? Two different gospels give two different figures. The actual numbers are a relatively trivial detail, but these examples highlight an important point - the unreliability of the Gospels concerning the life and teachings of Jesus and therefore their unsuitability as a basis for doctrine.

Moreover, in general, it is particularly important to consider that not only are the Gospels not contemporary accounts, they were actually written retrospectively in a climate of disassociation from Judaism and ingratiating with pagan Rome during or following the failed Jewish anti-Roman uprising of 66-74 AD. In contrast, the earlier and more authentic gospel written by Barnabas was excluded from the official Bible and suppressed by the Pauline-dominated Church establishment from the 4th century onward.

In addition, it seems silly to have to point it out, but Jesus, his apostles and disciples were Jews whose scriptures were in Hebrew. However, the New Testament was written in Greek. And an appendix to the Good News Bible authorized by the Catholic Church lists 85 instances including 15 in the Gospels where New Testament writers have Jesus and the other central characters of early Christianity quoting from, paraphrasing or alluding to texts not from the original Old Testament in Hebrew but the from Septuagint version, a Greek translation made in Egypt around 200 BC. The appendix states:

**In a number of instances this version differs significantly in meaning from the Masoretic Hebrew text.**

It is not credible that the Jesus and his followers would be quoting from a foreign language translation containing significant differences rather than from the Hebrew original of their Jewish scriptures. This casts further doubt on the



accuracy of the New Testament and again undermines its validity as a basis for doctrine.

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#### Footnotes:

[1] ([http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/C\\_Transp/C\\_Index.html](http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/C_Transp/C_Index.html))

## (part 3 of 4): From Trinitarianism to Unitarianism

### The Quran - perfectly preserved and unaltered

I would like to mention in passing that in contrast to the compilation of the New Testament and specifically the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Quran, which is one book, was revealed in its entirety to one prophet, Mohammed. It was memorized by many of his followers as it was received over a period of 23 years and was also written down during Mohammed's lifetime. It was definitively transcribed within two decades of Mohammed's death and verified by his closest surviving companions. Two of the four copies of the original Quran made at that time are still in existence - one in Istanbul in Turkey, the other in Tashkent in Uzbekistan in former Soviet central Asia. Every Arabic Qur'an in the world today is, letter for letter, identical to this ancient script.

Indeed, in the 19th century, an institute of Munich University in Germany collected a staggering forty-two thousand different copies of the Quran including manuscripts and printed texts produced in various parts of the Islamic world over a period spanning thirteen hundred years. Research work was carried out on these texts for half a century, at the end of which the researchers concluded that apart from copying mistakes, there was no discrepancy in the text of these forty-two thousand copies, even though they were produced at different times between the first and fourteenth Islamic centuries and had been procured from all parts of the world. Unfortunately this institute and its priceless treasure of Quranic manuscripts were destroyed in an Allied bombing attack on Germany during World War II, but the findings of its research project survived.

In short, the Quran stands or falls as one. The integrity of the text itself is above reproach. There remains only a personal decision whether to accept it or not as the word of God.

In addition to the Quran, the ahadeeth, or sayings of Prophet Mohammed, which form the secondary strand of Islamic scripture, were meticulously collected and authenticated by the second Islamic century by Muslim scholars who only

accepted a given saying as genuine if it had a proven chain of trustworthy transmitters stretching back to one or more original companion of the Prophet. Many thousands of plausible sayings were rejected if they did not meet these strict criteria.

## **Doubts about Jesus's divinity even within the Gospels**

Even within the four canonical Gospels there are numerous passages which cast doubt on the divinity of Jesus and therefore on the concept of Trinity which presupposes it. There are at least twenty instances where Jesus prays. See Matthew 14:23, 19:13, 26:39, 27:46, 26:42-44; Mark 1:35, 6:46, 14:35-36; Luke 3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 9:28, 11:1-4, 22:41; John 14:16, 17:1, 17:9, 17:11, 17:15. If Jesus were himself divine, i.e. God, to whom is he praying and why?

Consider also these passages:

Matthew 26:39

Jesus and God had different wills.

Matthew 19:16-17, Mark 10:17-18 and Luke 18:18-19.

Jesus denied divinity by distinguishing between himself and God.

Luke 7:16, 13:33, 24:19; John 4:19

Jesus was regarded by his disciples and other contemporaries as a prophet. They do not acclaim him as an incarnation of God or the Son of God.

## **My Journey from Catholic Christian to Arian Unitarian to Muslim**

As a result of my studies and after much soul-searching, I came to reject Pauline church doctrinal innovations such as the Trinity, a concept unknown to Jesus' disciples and not definitively established as official church doctrine until as late as 381A.D. I found myself in sympathy with the more purely monotheist beliefs of the late third and early fourth century priest Arius of Alexandria and others such as Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia (later Patriarch of Constantinople), their teacher, the respected priest and martyr Lucian of Antioch and, in later decades, Roman Emperor Constantius II. The Catholic Encyclopaedia<sup>[1]</sup> defines Arianism as:

“a heresy which arose in the fourth century, and denied the divinity of Jesus Christ,... not a modern form of unbelief, and [it] therefore will appear strange in modern eyes.”



What the encyclopaedia fails to mention is that what they are describing as heresy was, in fact, official church doctrine in the middle of the fourth century. For example, after the Council of Ariminum (present-day Rimini in Italy) in 359A.D. St. Jerome wrote, “the whole world groaned and marvelled to find itself Arian”. This prevailed until after the death of Constantius II and his fellow Arian successors when a changing political climate within the Roman Empire resulted in the persecution of Arian Christians and the conclusive imposition of Trinitarianism as official church doctrine at the Second General Council in 381A.D.

When I too came to the conclusion that Jesus was not divine, I had crossed an essential hurdle in terms of mindset and beliefs. Whether or not Jesus is divine is the absolute crux of the matter as far as any believing, theologically aware Christian is concerned. Once I had come to this new understanding of Jesus, it was but a small step for me to be able to accept a later prophet and embrace Islam, just as the North African and Iberian Arian Christians, denounced by the Church but physically safe outside the shrinking borders of the Roman Empire, had done en masse when Islam was introduced to them in the decades after the death of Mohammed. Because of my Christian upbringing, I was used to the concept of God sending prophets periodically throughout history at times when mankind had fallen away from His teachings. Islam recognizes the Old Testament prophets I was familiar with plus John the Baptist and Jesus. Given that, by the seventh century, Arabia had lapsed into polytheism and much of the Christian world was Trinitarian, it made sense to me that God should send a new prophet, Mohammed, to call mankind back to the correct worship of Himself, the one true god.

There are 25 prophets recognized by name in the Quran. All but three of them are also mentioned in Jewish or Christian scripture:

- 1) Adam
- 2) Idrís (Idrees)
- 3) Núh (Noah)
- 4) Húd
- 5) Sálíh
- 6) Ibráhím (Abraham)
- 7) Ismá’íl (Ishmael)
- 8) Isháq (Isaac)
- 9) Lút (Lot)
- 10) Ya’qúb (Jacob)

- 11) Yúsuf (Joseph)
- 12) Shu'aib
- 13) Ayúb (Job)
- 14) Músa (Moses)
- 15) Hárún (Aaron)
- 16) Dhu l-kifl (Ezekiel)
- 17) Dawúd (David)
- 18) Sulaimán
- 19) Ilyás (Elijah)
- 20) al-Yasa' (Elisha)
- 21) Yúnus (Jonas)
- 22) Zakaríya (Zakariyah)
- 23) Yahyá (John the Baptist)
- 24) 'Ísa (Jesus)
- 25) Muhammad

I had now reached the point where I genuinely wanted to be a Muslim in my own right, whether my interest in the Muslim lady mentioned previously led to marriage or not. (In fact the relationship in question eventually did not work out.) For I see my conversion to Islam not as a rejection of what I regard as true Christianity, simply as a rejection of the tangent or erroneous path along which Paul and his followers led astray the new, gentile, former polytheistic Christians of the Greco-Roman world. Sadly, all major forms of modern Christianity - Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism - stem from Paul.

The Catholic Encyclopaedia states that Arianism has never been revived (although it concedes that such eminent figures as Sir Isaac Newton and Milton displayed Arian sympathies). What it fails to acknowledge is that Arianism has, for the last fourteen hundred years, been incorporated within Islam. There is no one left within Catholicism, Protestantism or Orthodoxy to espouse the oneness of God. The reason why Trinitarianism now rules unfettered within the greatly reduced geographical boundaries of old world Christendom is that the peoples of all the southern Mediterranean formerly Arian Christian strongholds are now overwhelmingly Muslim!

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**Footnotes:**

[1] Catholic Encyclopaedia  
(<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01707c.htm>)

## **(part 4 of 4): Statement of Theological Beliefs**

With a clear conscience and with none of the mental torment on this issue that I had to face when I first started studying Islam, I can now state that I believe Jesus to have been an entirely human prophet of God, one of the greatest prophets of God and worthy of the utmost respect, but that he was neither an incarnation of God nor the Son of God. I believe that Jesus, a pious, monotheistic Jew, would be absolutely horrified by what Trinitarian Christians have made him out to be. Previously I feared that I would be betraying Jesus if I became a Muslim. Now I realised that I had been, in effect, inadvertently blaspheming and saying what I had no right to say about him.

I believe Mohammed to have been a later (the last) prophet of God. And just as the true Christianity of Jesus' genuine apostles in Jerusalem is the successor to Judaism, so is Islam, the final revelation of God's word, the legitimate successor to and fulfilment of original Jerusalem-Jewish Christianity.

I would like to make absolutely clear that I did not convert to Islam because of a romantic relationship. The possibility of marriage to a Muslim woman was the spur, the catalyst, which sparked my initial investigation of Islam. For the record, the relationship in question later broke down in 2001, but I still remain a Muslim.

My conversion to Islam, when it came, was a sincere one, not one of convenience. It had to be sincere. I could not in good conscience have undergone a fraudulent one. Religion, God, is too important to be trifled with. One's soul is at stake.

I rejected Christianity as it is known to us today because I no longer believed in the doctrine of Trinity and the claim that Jesus is God. I came to believe wholeheartedly in the oneness of God. And I judge this belief to have found its best expression in the religion of Islam. Whatever the future may hold in terms of personal relationships, I will continue to hold these beliefs.

At times I can't help but seriously wonder whether vast swathes of the religious community I have joined have forgotten the theological core of Islam and buried it with cranky behavioural regulations which they seek to impose on others, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, although God clearly states in the Quran that there is "no compulsion". I admit at times to feeling rather disillusioned at certain interpretations I have encountered among Muslims of what constitutes legitimate

Islamic practice and behaviour. I assure you that people with a Taliban mindset are not confined to Afghanistan.

And I am sickened by the politicized hate-filled philosophy, which passes itself off as Islam when in fact not only does it violate the most basic Islamic rules of warfare, it is often indicative of a complete lack of trust in God's promise that no one will have to suffer more than they can endure. These extremists have set the cause of the spread of Islam back decades. At times I can't help but echo the lament of British convert, Michael A. Malik<sup>[1]</sup>: "Islam is wonderful, but I can't stand the Muslims!"

But in spite of my frequent disillusionment with the behaviour and attitudes of many of those who call themselves Muslim, in terms of beliefs about the nature of God, I will remain a believer in the oneness of God - for life.

Some time ago an American Protestant friend brought a wonderful quotation of Martin Luther's to my attention:

**Everyone must do his own believing, as he will have to do his own dying.**

I am completely at peace with myself about my new, pure monotheistic theological beliefs exemplified by Islam. And this is my statement of belief:

**He is God, the only One,**  
Qul Huwa Allāhu 'Aḥad

**God the Everlasting.**  
Allāhu Aṣ-Ṣamad

**He did not beget and is not begotten,**  
Lam Yalid Wa Lam Yūlad

**And none is His equal. (Quran - Surah 112)**  
Walam Yakun Lahu Kufūan 'Aḥad.

**I bear witness that there is no god but the God**  
Ashadu an la illaha ill allah

**and I bear witness that Mohammed is a prophet of God.**  
Wa ashadu anna Mohammadan rasool Ullah.

## **Thanks to Parents**

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my parents - devout, practicing Catholics - who, although strongly disapproving of my conversion to Islam on theological grounds, have accepted my decision and have

continued to show me great love, understanding, sensitivity and practical support. I have been most blessed in this regard.

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**Footnotes:**

[1] (<http://www.islamfortoday.com/malik01.htm>)