

Muslim Strategies to Convert Western Christians

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Middle East Quarterly

Spring 2009, pp. 3-14

<http://www.meforum.org/2104/muslim-strategies-to-convert-western-christians>

The conversion of Christians in Europe and the United States to Islam has become a matter of debate in some Western countries. Muslim scholars have called on immigrant Muslims to become involved in summoning non-Muslims to their faith. Indeed, the call on Muslim migrants to proselytize has become central in contemporary Islamic writings, not only in books, but also in sermons—many online on YouTube—and others on DVDs, and Islamic websites. The strategies that the global Islamic media uses to promote conversion of Christians to Islam illustrate both the perceptions of Islamists and can expose themes to defend and promote in cultural and public diplomacy.

Background

The history of Muslim-Christian relations is to some extent that of two civilizations championing a universalistic message and competing for world domination. In the early phases of this struggle, as demonstrated by Bernard Lewis, Islam was more tolerant: In Muslim lands conquered by Christians, Christianity was imposed by force, and Muslims were sooner or later forced to choose between conversion, exile, and death; in Christian lands conquered by Muslims, Christians were tolerated alongside Jews as "People of the Book." One reason for this difference in attitude was that Muslims considered Christ a precursor while Christians considered Muhammad an impostor. In Muslim eyes, Christianity had some truth in it; in Christian eyes, Islam was completely false.^[1] Today, the balance of tolerance has dramatically reversed: In the West, freedom of religion allows for people of all faiths to convince others that theirs is the one and only truth; on the other hand, in some Muslim societies, non-Muslims are prosecuted, and promotion of other religions is a punishable offense.

Exact data on the number of converts to Islam in the West is incomplete because conversions are not always recorded. While the data do not suggest a massive wave of new believers, there are enough to matter. In Germany, statisticians estimated that several thousand Christians convert to Islam every year.^[2] In Spain, the number of converts reached around 20,000 in 2006,^[3] and in the United Kingdom, perhaps 14,000 had converted by 2006.^[4] In the United States, perhaps 20,000 to 25,000 people a year convert to Islam. The number of converts significantly increased in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attack, although it is not yet certain that the conversion surge in the United States has continued.^[5]

While the data do not suggest that conversions can fundamentally change existing European demographics, they do highlight the challenge of conflicting values for Western democracies. Freedom of religion guarantees every person the right to convince or be convinced that a different faith than his own is true; however, some Muslim converts reject the very liberal

foundations that allow them to operate freely. And the same Muslims who accept conversions to their faith may not accept conversion away from it. When even a very small percentage of converts to Islam turn fanatic, there is a very real security risk, not only in the state of residence but also in every country with which that state enjoys reciprocal visa-free travel. Indeed, this is a major reason why the U.S. Department of Homeland Security now requests pre-screening even for travelers from countries not requiring visas prior to travel to the United States.[\[6\]](#)

Immigration for Proselytization

Many Sunni scholars urge their co-religionists in the West to spread the word of God actively. The call to convert, which increased along with the number of permanent Muslim immigrants to Europe, is part of a larger framework of identity and duties constructed by Sunni religious scholars in the Arab world since the 1970s. Islamic scholars found that to ban or ignore mass Muslim migration would only alienate immigrants. Instead, they focused on strengthening the immigrants' Muslim identity while using them in the service of Islam. They called upon Muslim immigrants to consider themselves part of a global Muslim nation; to legitimize their presence in non-Muslim lands by acting as ideal Muslims; to build Muslim institutions such as mosques and charity organizations; to serve the political interests of Muslims worldwide; and to proselytize.[\[7\]](#)

Writing about the "duties of Muslims living in the West," Egyptian-born Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, perhaps the most influential contemporary Sunni jurist, wrote:

Muslims in the West ought to be sincere callers to their religion. They should keep in mind that calling others to Islam is not only restricted to scholars and sheikhs, but it goes far to encompass every committed Muslim. As we see scholars and sheikhs delivering *khutbas* [sermons] and lectures, writing books to defend Islam, it is no wonder to find lay Muslims practicing *da'wa* [spreading Islam] while employing wisdom and fair exhortation.[\[8\]](#)

Muhammad al-Ghazali (1917-96), a renowned Egyptian religious scholar, a leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood movement and the head of *da'wa* for Egypt's ministry of religious endowments, expressed the hope that the hundreds of thousands of Muslim immigrants "will not only maintain their religion, but become pioneers in spreading it, if only the Muslim *umma* (nation) wished for that and worked for that to happen."[\[9\]](#)

Hamdi Hassan, a professor of media studies at al-Azhar University in Cairo, wrote that the Muslim presence in Europe is an example of Muslim proselytizing turning from the defensive mode that characterized it during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to a new mode of expansion.[\[10\]](#)

In Saudi writings, these notions of proselytizing acquire a militant, confrontational tone. One source of these writings is the Saudi scholar Safr al-Hawali, who has invoked the need to conquer the West with *da'wa*, using terms unequivocal in their combativeness:

And if one would ask: Why should we not invade Korea and Japan [as the Muslims have] human resources for *da'wa*? ... to this someone else would answer: No, we should direct [the human

resources for *da'wa*] to Europe and America. Who is right? The one who says the West. Why? Because [the West] is the enemy whose depth we must penetrate ... It is the enemy who will attack us and is more dangerous to us.[\[11\]](#)

The call on Muslim immigrants to Islamize Westerners finds resonance in some works by Western Muslims. Muhammad al-Qadi al-'Umrani is a Sunni Muslim living in the Netherlands, who wrote a Ph.D. dissertation at King Muhammad I University in Morocco on migration. He invokes the conversion of "a considerable number of Westerners" to Islam as one positive result of migration and contends that migration for the purposes of commerce and *da'wa* has been proven throughout history to be a constructive contribution to the spread of Islam.[\[12\]](#)

Islamic Internet Proselytizing

Internet sites operated by Muslim scholars and organizations play an important role in encouraging the conversion of Christians. This role is part of an embrace and use of the Internet as a medium in the service of Islam. While policymakers have focused most attention in recent years on jihadi websites, these attract comparatively little traffic.[\[13\]](#) While the most widely viewed Islamic websites are not jihadi, they do, nonetheless, often include hateful depictions of the West.

Muslim scholars traditionally reacted to new technologies—especially those developed in the West—with skepticism, fearing that such new innovations could bring more harm than good to Muslims. Printing machines entered the Ottoman Empire three centuries after they were first introduced in Europe. Scholars regarded them as *bid'a*, an unlawful innovation, and it took the Napoleonic conquest of Egypt in 1798 to allow acknowledgment of their merit. While liberalizing forms of interpretation have allowed more flexible approaches for some Muslim scholars since the late nineteenth century, this has not been the case in Saudi Arabia. During the 1920s, Saudi scholars protested King 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Saud's decision to use wireless communication, claiming it was devilish.[\[14\]](#) The introduction of television broadcasts in the 1960s also caused outrage.

The attitude towards the Internet has proved quite different. Even the strictest Wahhabi scholars have legitimized the Internet—and launched their personal websites. Clerics understand that the Internet is a crucial arena in the fight for the souls and minds of the younger generation, and also that the Internet can be better controlled and screened compared to other media technologies. Using the Internet for Islamic purposes was not only permitted by scholars, even strict Wahhabi ones, but even encouraged.

Ja'far Sheikh Idris, a Sudanese professor of theology, wrote in 1999 that new technologies allow Muslims to spread *da'wa* more easily and are, indeed, proof that Islam is the true religion (for only God could have known fourteen centuries ago that the day would come when the world would turn into one global village, needing only one global prophet—Muhammad). However, these new technologies also allow non-Muslims to do the same with their ideas; indeed, at this point in time, the West enjoys better capabilities in making use of these technologies and might weaken Muslims' beliefs through them. But these risks, argued Idris, do not deny the merits of

the Internet; they only emphasize the need for Muslims to further utilize these technologies in the service of Islam.[\[15\]](#)

Analyzing Convert Narrations

Some Internet sites created by Muslim scholars and organizations reserve significant space for literature on Christians converting to Islam. Conversion efforts are promoted also by print media,[\[16\]](#) books,[\[17\]](#) and DVDs,[\[18\]](#) but the Internet shines as an especially effective medium.[\[19\]](#)

Islamic Internet sites promote conversion in several ways: basic introductions to Islam; basic information for non-Muslims who wish to convert; news celebrating Islam as the world's and the West's fastest growing religion; and guides instructing Muslims in the West on how to bring others to Islam. Such guidelines are at times detailed and have the ring of marketing expertise.

A key method Internet sites use to promote conversions is through the testimonies of former Christians who have converted to Islam. Perhaps the most famous conversion narrative is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the American black nationalist, who described his early life as one of gambling, doing drugs, and dating many women amid crime-ridden neighborhoods in Boston. After conversion, he headed the Nation of Islam and then, after pilgrimage to Mecca, found true Islam. What the Internet has done is replicate and mass produce the genre, allowing Islamists to bombard the audience with narratives, each with enough variation in personal stories so as to allow a greater opportunity for readers to identify with one narrative or another.

These narratives play a dual role: To a potential non-Muslim audience, they serve as apologia celebrating different aspects of Islam's superiority over Christianity. They aim to prove that any difficulties faced during the process of conversion may be overcome. The other role narratives play is to reassure Muslims that their religion is the true one and to educate them on tactics of persuasion in bringing non-Muslims to Islam.

A connecting thread for many narratives on conversion, suggested directly or indirectly, is the concept of reversion: the idea that everyone is born in a natural state of Islam—a state of submission to the will of God—which is corrupted by family and society and that rather than converting away from something, coming to accept Islam is reverting to that original human state.[\[20\]](#) The way to Islam is thus depicted as natural, almost obvious, rather than rebellious or exotic.

Strategies of Persuasion

It is one thing to make conversion a goal. It is quite another to fulfill it. Studies on conversion to Christian sects found that only one of a thousand approaches by proselytizers resulted in conversion.[\[21\]](#) Eighty narratives of converts to Islam appearing on the most widely-accessed global Muslim Internet sites and two other Islamic web sites of lesser popularity, analyzed for the purpose of this study, demonstrate several arguments and strategies. While it is difficult to quantify narratives as they appear continuously, they do not differ significantly, and these eighty are representative.

There are several Islamic interest web portals involved in catalyzing conversion, among other activities. Islamway.com, launched in August 1998, is the world's most popular Islamic website, according to the web traffic-ranking company, Alexa.com,[\[22\]](#) and offers content mainly in Arabic and in English from the 'Asir region in southern Saudi Arabia. Its vast *fatwa* (religious edict) bank suggests it is dominated by the Wahhabi school. IslamOnline.net, one of the world's most popular Muslim websites, launched in June 1997 and offers content in Arabic and in English. Yusuf al-Qaradhawi serves as head of the supervising committee. The Islamic Garden, launched in March 2001 and operating from Cairo, is a basic English-language site focusing on introductory contents; and diewahrereligion.de, a German-language site operating from Cologne, associated with the mass-converter Pierre Vogel, who studied Islam in Saudi Arabia, has some resonance with young German Muslims.

The narratives associated with these four websites divide generally into three sections. First, the narrator explains why he was discontent with Christianity or with his life in general; then, he depicts how he first came to learn about Islam; and, finally, he glorifies the merits of Islam. Narrations seem to depict real life experiences, emotions, and convictions and are rich with biographical details, some of which relate to sensitive personal issues such as crises in marital life. This creates an impression of authenticity and generates empathy, allowing the reader to forget that the confession is part of a larger project to persuade that Islam is a true religion.

Scholars studying conversion find that spiritual poverty is a frequent condition prior to conversion, and a sense of closing the distance to God is the result of embracing a new religion.[\[23\]](#) The online narratives by converts to Islam, much like the autobiography of Malcolm X, reflect this. Converts commonly begin with depictions of the agonizing lives they had before they found Islam. In narrating their religious affiliation prior to conversion, two main story lines are common: that of converts who were Christians either because they were coerced or because of opportunistic consideration, and that of converts who were strictly practicing Christians but developed grave doubts about their faith.

While an uneasy relationship with Christianity varies in its consequences and reasoning, all narrators describe practicing Christianity in their early life as a result of their social background, rather than from a self-made spiritual choice. Asserting the concept that every person is born a Muslim and only society corrupts him serves to rationalize the conversion process. The former relation to Christianity is depicted as having more to do with culture, tradition, and society than with true personal faith.

While secularism, and even atheism, is an option in Western societies, it hardly finds resonance in these narratives. Lacking empirical evidence, it is impossible to determine whether this background of religiosity reflects the overall reality of converts or an editorial decision made by site managers. However, because a wider spectrum of backgrounds would support the claim of these sites regarding Islam's universality, there is reason to believe the common religious background is not an editorial manipulation.

In detailing doubts that clouded them, often from an early age, converts whose relation to Christianity was profound describe how they gradually developed an understanding that Christianity is an inherently irrational religion. They invoke a variety of disagreements with

several Christian dogmas: the concept of God as a human being; the concept of the Trinity; the concept of sainthood; and the concept of original sin. Discrepancies in the Old and New Testaments are also mentioned by several narrators.

Convert Narratives

On IslamOnline.net, convert Abu Mohammed Abdullah Yousef offers non-Muslims a simple challenge: "You Are a Muslim, You Just Don't Know It Yet." Abu Mohammed describes a post-World War II, English childhood in a strictly Catholic home. Religion was one of his favorite subjects in school, and at the age of eleven, he earned a scholarship for a Jesuit boarding school. However, at school he began to notice "the inconsistencies between what was taught in religious lessons and what was taught in history classes." He could not understand how the infallibility of the pope was commensurate with the changing of old rulings by new popes. [24] Of course, such changing interpretations are not unique to Christianity. Within Shi'i Islam, followers must find new sources of emulation when the Grand Ayatollah whom they follow passes away; this might mandate revision in the interpretation followed. And, of course, while Sunni leaders may not claim infallibility, Sunni scholars dispute among each other the authenticity of *hadiths* (narratives of the Prophet).

Another depicts Islam as a remedy to the growing secularization of Western life, which Christianity fails to fill. Hayat Anne Collins Osman, an American whose age is not specified, writes in "Could I Speak with God Directly" on IslamOnline.net that she was raised at a time when "Americans were more religious than they are now." Her parents were involved in a church community, and they often invited priests to their home. In junior high school, she attended a Bible study program for many years. However, the more she learned her Bible, the more she doubted it. The idea of original sin did not make sense to her: "I had a baby brother, and I knew that babies were not sinful." The concept of the Trinity also troubled her: "How could God have three parts, one of which was human?" [25]

Converts to Islam describe a range of circumstances for their conversions. They mention hostile Western media portrayals of Islam that encouraged them to further their knowledge; Muslim friends, colleagues, and neighbors who introduced them to Islam; falling in love with Muslims; incidental meetings; and traveling to Muslim countries.

While circumstances differ, four themes are repeated:

First, the converts knew nothing, or almost nothing, about the true foundations of Islam before embracing it.

Second, converts were not drawn to Islam because of any material benefit or social pressure.

Third, narrators present the path to Islam as an individual quest and never as a group experience.

Fourth, converts say that they were introduced to Islam by individual Muslims, most commonly ones without formal religious training but with a simple desire to share the truth with others.

In describing how negative press and social prejudices had the counter-effect of introducing Islam as the true religion, the narratives turn weakness into strength. It is God's will that Islam spreads; thus, attempts to dishonor it in the West are bound only to promote it. Such is the narrative of David Pradarelli, whose age is not mentioned and whose story appears on IslamOnline.net under the title "Finding the Truth." He testifies to having been raised as a Roman Catholic, who always had "deep fascination with the spiritualities of other cultures." Spending some time in the Catholic Franciscan order, Pradarelli was disappointed in what he describes as the order's arrogance and hypocrisy. Once he had left the order, he began searching for a way to find God. Then, "I decided to research Islam for myself and draw my own conclusions. What I found paled all the negative images that the satanic media spewed forth. I found a religion deep in love and spiritual truth, and constant God-mindfulness."[\[26\]](#)

The Role of the 9/11 Attacks

Several narrators describe the 9/11 attacks as awakening their curiosity about Islam, which led them to embrace the religion. An anonymous female narrator on Islamselect.com, accessed through IslamOnline.net, wrote about a "Journey of a Lifetime: My Way to Islam," explaining that, after 9/11, she wanted to examine whether Islam was really about killing and hatred. She Googled with an open mind the words Islam and Qur'an. It so happened that her search came at a time when, at seventeen years of age, she had begun to question her Roman Catholic faith. Two years later, she moved to another city where she met Muslims at the university she was attending; they gave her books and DVDs about their faith. Joining her new friends in the mosque, she felt at home as she never had in church. That experience, she said, completed her journey to the true religion.[\[27\]](#)

It is not a coincidence that these narratives emphasize personal friendships with Muslims as essential to bringing about conversion. Many studies have found that friendship and kinship networks facilitate conversion.[\[28\]](#) Religious scholars such as Qaradhawi, who emphasize the duty of the lay Muslim migrant to bring others to Islam, understand that while new media is powerful, it is no substitute for personal relations. Indeed, an emphasis on personal relationships underscores Fethullah Gülen's movement and Tablighi Jamaat as well.[\[29\]](#) Islamic websites seek to encourage such relations by offering testimonies that demonstrate their efficiency. Muslim acquaintances are mentioned in several narratives as a bridge between complete ignorance and embracing the truth. They are depicted as particularly kind and warm people whose grace transforms the narrator's prior prejudices against Muslims. While saving no effort in bringing others to Islam, these lay Muslims do so in a non-imposing, gentle manner. Their happiness, inner peace, devotion, and hospitality serve as the best incentive for others to embrace Islam.

Another account refers to Muslim friends and shows how they played a similar role in the conversion of Omar Faruq (formerly Thomas Ordinius), a 48-year-old German convert of thirty-one years who appears on diewahrereligion.de. He describes having a friend of Turkish descent in school who introduced him to other Turkish Germans. Through this group of friends, he was introduced to Turkish culture and embraced its warmth and hospitality. He started to learn Turkish and developed an interest in Islam. Visiting his friend's village in Turkey, he was invited by a local imam to a Friday prayer. At the time, he still feared Islam, but he became increasingly involved in the religion. Back in Germany, a friend told him about a Turkish mosque in

Mannheim, thirty kilometers from his home. He went there with the friend and officially converted. Three years after converting he traveled to Medina where he studied Islam and Arabic.[\[30\]](#)

"Islam's Truth Is Inescapable"

Other narratives also echo the idea that the personal conduct of the individual lay Muslim migrant is crucial to bring Christians to Islam. When Muslims meet with Christians, narrators hint, patience and courtesy can make the difference. When Hayat Ann Collins Osman finally decided she wished to convert, she called a mosque, but the brother who answered the phone told her to "wait until you are sure." However, that only further encouraged her, to the point that she "became obsessed with Islam" until some months later, while working in the kitchen, she "suddenly knew, knew I was a Muslim."[\[31\]](#)

Selma Cook explains in a narrative, "Why I Became a Muslim," on The Islamic Garden, how after moving into a new apartment and meeting Muslim neighbors, "I thought I would try out some missionary work on them. They listened to me patiently, and then I, too, listened to them. They didn't try to explain any complicated issues to me; they just read to me from the Qur'an."

This, it turned out, was enough: The beautiful sound of the Arabic language touched the narrator's heart, and the plain and direct language of the English translation struck a chord within.[\[32\]](#)

Narratives also suggest that Muslims can bring people to Islam even without intending to. This again serves to emphasize the concept of reversion: Islam's truth is inescapable, and therefore, the mere introduction to its tenets can open the process of fully embracing it. Here, a subtext is directed to Muslims reading the narrations: Interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims should not be feared; they will eventually serve the interests of Islam.

Sebastian from Kassel describes how falling in love with a Muslim was instrumental in his finding the true religion. While the relationship led him to the righteous path, conversion was not necessitated by a need to please a spouse but rather by deep belief. Sebastian testifies that at the time of developing a relation with a Muslim woman, he thought it was a sign from God that he should convert in order to be able to marry her. Two months later he ordered a copy of the Qur'an. His girlfriend noticed his transformation but apparently did not appreciate it. They broke up. However, his interest in Islam only increased. He read more and more of the Qur'an, and several months later he converted.[\[33\]](#)

Another narrator, Anna Linda Traustadottir, a native of Iceland, raised in Canada and the United States, mentions her Muslim spouse whom she met while working in Damascus: "To be honest, when I married Mohammad, I married him because I loved him, *even though* he was Muslim. Over time, I realized I love him *because* he was a Muslim. A good Muslim [emphasis in original]."[\[34\]](#)

In a narrative mentioned above, Abu Muhammed Abdullah Yousef says that he encountered Islam when he left the United Kingdom in 1976 for a Muslim country to teach electronics to

commissioned and noncommissioned air force officers. Nothing in the behavior of his Muslim students impressed him: they neither prayed; nor did they have a religious attitude, and some were even drinking and womanizing. He started to read the Qur'an for two reasons: First, he wanted to be a good instructor and hoped reading the Qur'an would help him understand his students' mindset; second, he wanted to prove Islam was wrong. However, the result of his endeavor was quite the opposite. Once the students found he was reading the Qur'an, they brought a sheikh to the classroom to speak with him. After questioning Abu Muhammed about his beliefs, the sheikh told him: "You are a Muslim. You just don't know it yet."[\[35\]](#) For several months Abu Muhammed continued to read the Qur'an, and the more he read, the more he was impressed by its logic, consistency, and purity. Several months later he converted.

Why Islam?

Converts invoke several reasons for embracing Islam: that, unlike Christianity, it makes sense to them; that Islam is commensurate with modern science; that Islam is an egalitarian religion, blind to the racial prejudices so common to Western culture; and that one betters himself upon embracing Islam, doing away with adverse personal and social behavior. In some narratives, a rather more emotional attitude is suggested, depicting a defining metaphysical moment of peace and understanding in which Islam was embraced; in some, this emotional attitude is preconditioned with a logical acceptance of Islam's truthfulness. Many of these may sound doubtful to those not susceptible to conversion or familiar with the nuances of Islam, but they nonetheless illustrate the view which Islamists wish to convey.

One notion suggested directly or implied by almost all narrators is the complete transformation Islam brought about in their lives. Where there was a void, Islam brought meaning; where there was disorder, Islam brought harmony; where there was despair, Islam brought hope. After embracing Islam, all hesitation and confusion faded away. Each found peace with himself, with his surroundings, and with God.

In "Why I Came to Islam?" Susie Brackenborough advances as an ultimate proof for Islam's truth that the Qur'an prefigured science in discoveries made by scientists only hundreds of years later. She suggests: "These 'miracles' have been discovered by scientists (such as the study of embryology) and explorers (such as the world is indeed round and not flat) many years after the revelation, and many more miracles are still to be found as our society develops and progresses."[\[36\]](#) Her words echo a theory rooted already in nineteenth century Muslim scholarship, which remains resonant today in many Islamic books and websites, especially those directed to a Western audience. Still, this train of argument, while common, is ironic given Islamic societies' contemporary deficit in science.[\[37\]](#)

Invoking science as proof for Islam's truthfulness, Amina Islam, an Austrian scientist, contends that "the holy Qur'an confirmed not only my idea about God and the world, but all his statements, e.g., about natural sciences, did obviously not contradict the reality."[\[38\]](#) Mosa Rigani contends that the Qur'an's assertion that there exists a "partition wall between fresh water and salt water" fascinated him as a miracle, proving the holy book's truthfulness.[\[39\]](#)

In some narrations, the egalitarianism of Islam is invoked as a reason for embracing it. Here, an incentive is offered for people of all colors and social strata to embrace Islam without fear of prejudice, but the subtle reference to Western society, where such differences still matter, is also clear. An anonymous narrator, depicting her conversion under the title, "Dressed all in white—the coward within," recalls how on her first visit to a mosque she was impressed by seeing that "every country or race you could imagine was represented in these rows of people, all standing, bowing, and prostrating before the maker of all. No intermediary—just the individual and the Creator."^[40] John Pugh, a Catholic-born Australian, writes: "It is known in Islam that an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab."^[41]

Some narrators depict the transformation Islam generated in their lives. Fabio Mosa Rigani claims that embracing Islam was the best decision he has ever made: Islam changed him into a better human being; now he is punctual and has stopped smoking. Steven Krauss (Abdul Lateef Abdullah), an American from New York born in 1973, who embraced Islam at twenty-eight, explains that after converting to Islam, he understands why so many people who do not believe have so much fear inside them: Life can be frightening without God. Finding Islam, he has acquired the ultimate "self-help" program; a path that puts everything in its proper place, that makes sense of life: "Now, life is order. Now, I know why I am here."^[42]

Several narrators tell of an emotional experience that drew them to Islam. The anonymous "Dressed all in white" recalls that before going to the mosque for the first time, she felt her inner light was burnt out, but in the mosque, she found "a feeling of peace, inner solitude, and quietness that I'd also found in reading the Qur'an and pondering over its meaning and trying to practice what it tells us."^[43]

Other narrators combine an emotional occasion with prior rational acceptance of Islam's truthfulness. Jennifer A. Bell tells how when her marriage was in trouble, she was losing faith in Christianity and found no comfort in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Shintoism, and other religions; she went on the Internet and visited chat rooms to escape from reality. There she met a man who was different from all the other men she talked to although she could not quite explain why. Only in their third or fourth meeting, did the gentleman tell her he was a Muslim. Then he started to explain to her what Islam was about and sent her e-mails with verses from the Qur'an that supported everything he told her. It "all felt right." Nevertheless, Bell was still not convinced that Islam was the true religion. When her marriage finally broke apart, and she became depressed, she contacted the man again: "He seemed to know so much about everything." He told her to take a bath, clean herself from head to toe, sit quietly to clear her mind, and concentrate on God. It sounded bizarre to her, but nevertheless, she did it. Then, "the most amazing thing" in her life happened: she started shaking, but as quickly as the shaking started, it stopped. Calming peace filled her heart and soul. That peace "was so absolute. I felt God enter my heart, and I accepted what he had to offer. Between this experience and what this friend has been telling me about Islam, I had finally found a religion that matched my feelings on theology."^[44]

Conclusion

Muslim religious scholars envision Islam as a universal religion and the Muslim nation as a global political-religious entity. In constructing a framework of identity and roles for Muslim immigrants in the West, they assign them a task: to bring non-Muslims to Islam. Islamic Internet sites are part of that effort. They offer introductory contents, practical information, guides for those converting, and the narratives of new Muslims.

Narratives from converts to Islam are dichotomizing: They depict Christianity as irrational and Christian life as empty; in contrast, they depict Islam as a rational religion that provides a connection to God, personal peace, and social harmony. Westerners may interpret these narratives as assaults on their culture. But perhaps their more important target is the Muslim immigrant: The narratives of converts offer these immigrants reassurance about their roots and task them with a spiritual mission, one that compensates them for the daily hardships many of them face and rewards them with honor and dignity. Some Muslim immigrants—especially young ones—obtain their knowledge on Islam and its relation to Christianity through immensely popular Islamic websites such as the Saudi Islamway.com; lacking access to other sources of information—for example, national programs for multi-faith dialogue, or more moderate Islamic media—might encourage these young Muslims to adopt views scornful of the societies in which they live.

The right of any person to proselytize, or the right of any person to convert to a religion of his choice, is a basic tenet of Western liberal societies. The unique context of some Muslim conversion efforts should not be ignored, though: They do not envision two civilizations living in harmony, but one, Islam, gaining world domination. There is some irony in the fact that the most vocal and popular proponents of efforts directed at the Islamization of the West and delegitimization of values it holds dear either operate from within the boundaries of, or are inspired by, Arab regimes which officially preach for multi-faith dialogue and are dependent on American support for their survival.

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