

Testimony of Adel Mohammed El Naggar

As a former Muslim, I have often been asked the following questions:

'Why have you changed your religion from Islam to Christianity?' To which I often reply, While Islam is a religion Christianity is not. Christianity is a relationship of the highest order, for it is a relationship with our eternal and glorious creator. For as Jesus Christ declared; "Now this is eternal life: that they may *know* you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3). This word 'know' in the original language denotes a personal, or experiential knowledge. Therefore, in the context of the passage just referred to, Jesus is clearly stating that the eternal life, that he gives, (John 4:14, 5:21, 6:27), is nothing less than a personal, experiential relationship, between individuals, who have placed their faith in Jesus the Messiah, and God the Father and God the Son.

'What has Christianity got to offer that Islam does not?' To which I reply, What has Islam got to offer that Christ does not? For Jesus promised, to all those who come to him, the forgiveness of sins through the shedding of his own precious blood, the divine power to overcome sin and temptation, a new nature, which now seeks to glorify God and to live in conformity to his will, the eternal security of those who place their faith and trust in him as the *only* way to reconciliation - between sinful humans and an infinitely holy God - His real abiding presence with the believer as they seek to love, follow and serve him and finally receive them into the glorious presence of the Triune God.

'Do I not feel shame for leaving Islam and becoming a Christian?' To which I unhesitatingly answer No! Why? Because what I was before was, according to God's judgement, an enemy of God. This is due to my sinful thoughts, words and deeds, which are all fruits of my sinful nature. God, who is infinitely holy and upright and whose eyes cannot look upon evil, nor can He leave this evil completely undealt with, has declared himself to be a God of justice and the One who must punish those who do sin, and that we *all* are by nature the children of wrath under His just judgement and eternal damnation.

However, God has also revealed himself to be a 'gracious and compassionate God, One who is slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness' (Ex. 34:6) and who does not delight in the death of the wicked, (Ezek 18:23). Therefore, He has, on His own initiative, instigated a plan of redemption, whereby His justice may be fully honoured, vindicated and satisfied and his mercy clearly and publicly demonstrated. This plan is commonly referred to as the Gospel of God, (Rom 1:3), or the 'Good News' and has as been accomplished through the righteous life, the atoning death, the miraculous resurrection and the glorious ascension of the *only* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men,' (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

But now I have received God's mercy and am no longer an enemy of God, but a child of God. I have come to believe upon him who is the core and the sum total of the Gospel, Jesus the Messiah. Therefore, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe." (Romans 1:16-17)

Finally, 'What would it take you to come back to Islam?' To which I reply, Why would I want to go back to Islam? For, Jesus boldly says, "Truly Truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgement, but has passed out of death into life." (John 5:24) We see in these words a precious promise from Jesus. If we not only hear his words, and by implication believe them, but also believe in the one who sent Him, referring to his father, then we shall no longer come in to judgement. The judgement being the eternal wrath of God poured out on those who have sinned against God, and who have refused to believe or accept God's plan of redemption, namely Christ and him crucified, (John 3). This judgement is often spoken in the Bible in terms of 'death,' (Revelation 20:14, 21:8), and Jesus is saying that *whoever* places their trust in him and his Father have crossed over from death to life. They have escaped the judgement of the fires of hell and are eternally secure in the new life that God has given them.

Therefore, for me to return to Islam would be like the man who was trapped in a burning building, and unable to help himself. But having been rescued by someone who was able to help him, promptly returns in to the fiery flames. I feel this to be an adequate image and therefore cannot imagine to return to Islam.

So, what caused this drastic departure from the faith of my fathers, to faith in Him who loved me and willingly gave himself for me? Well, the first cause is none other than God Himself. For Jesus the Messiah has declared "No one comes to me *unless* the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:44) He, and he alone, drew me to faith in His precious Son, so that I may receive the eternal salvation, that he had purposed to give me, before the very foundations of the earth were ever created, (Ephesians 1:3-7).

But how did this drawing take place? How did the eternal, holy God draw this wretched sinful man to faith in him who *alone* is The Way, The Truth and The Life? Well, it happened like this.

I was born in Alexandria, Egypt, to Muslim parents. In 1963, at the age of three my father died. Due to the stigma that quickly attaches itself to widows in many Muslim countries, my mother remarried an English electrical engineer, based in Cairo, who incidentally converted to Islam. After a lengthy legal battle, with the Egyptian Home Office, my mother and stepfather were able to take me to England, where my stepfather had been reposted.

In the ensuing years, I was raised in the Islamic faith and considered myself to be a Muslim. I was taught the fundamental beliefs of Islam and encouraged to practice the duties of the Muslim. Coupled with this, I was taught not to believe in the Christian Faith, as it was corrupt and was led to believe that it was basically 'the white man's religion' anyway. Therefore, I sought to maintain my identity, within the Islamic Faith, and kept Christianity at arms length.

However, in my teenage years I formulated a habit of stealing, not to mention engaging in illicit sexual relationships with English women, which carried on in to my early twenties. I always knew that this was wrong, yet did not really appreciate the full gravity of these actions, before a holy and just God, nor did I have the power to transform myself and to live the life which I knew was right. It was as if I believed in the existence of God, yet lived as if there wasn't a God.

In 1984, I moved to Southern California, America with my English girlfriend, with the express intention of starting a new life and seeking a better future. We chose America because my girlfriend had been previously working there for several years and had been promised another job. Several months after arriving in America our relationship began to disintegrate. I started to experiment with drugs and, once our relationship went into decline and eventually collapsed, I started to depend more and more on them, to hide my feeling of emptiness and loneliness. For once in my life, I began to feel lost and all alone. Here was I in a country with over 250 million people, yet the sense of being lost and alone was very overwhelming!

About this time, I began to run into people who called themselves 'Born Again Christians.' I would meet them at work, on the beaches or at the homes of work colleagues. I often found them unexplainably strange and different, but never really paid much attention to them or what they would have to say. To be quite frank, I thought they were 'religious' cranks and didn't want anything to do with them or what they appeared to be peddling.

After about a year of being in the States, I began to question the meaning and purpose of my existence. Surely life was more than an endless cycle of working, sleeping, eating and breathing. Surely there must be more to life than this. My quest for the answers to these questions began to preoccupy my daily thoughts with a vengeance. I sought to find the answer in gaining knowledge, going to college, getting a highly paid job, getting more involved in sexual relationships and taking more and more drugs. Life began to take on the characteristic element of searching and yet futility!

I seemed to be locked into a cycle of looking for the meaning and purpose of my existence and the more I did so, the more I found myself sensing a deep and empty void within. It was as if my life was a large jigsaw puzzle with a piece missing from the middle. And I was seeking to know what this missing piece was and to fill the gaping hole with whatever I could.

Accompanied with this sensation of searching, lostness, and emptiness was an ever increasing sense of my own sinfulness, and inability to change myself, or the course that my life was heading down, and of the impending doom and judgement to come. I remember vividly how one day, after taking a large amount of drugs, I sensed that what I was doing was extremely evil, that I was under God's judgement for my sinful ways and that I was unable to help myself or change my sinful nature. It was at this point that I cried out to God, the God who is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and asked Him to deliver me from the bondage of my sin and of its penalty - death. I knew that this

sentence was hanging over my head, like a guillotine, ready to drop at the command of Him whom I had sinned so greatly against.

Then God, who never turns away a truly repentant sinner, (Luke 18:9-14), heard and answered my prayer. Not long after this, I was speaking with a young lady, who happened to be renting a room in the same building as myself. She talked to me about Christianity, at which point I clearly told her 'I was not interested in religion.' She then proceeded to inform me that Christianity was not a religion, but a relationship, a relationship with God. At this, my mind reeled. How on earth can we, ants in comparison with God, have a relationship with the Almighty Creator? I retorted. To me, God was transcendent and, therefore, personally unknowable.

She then proceeded to inform me that this personal relation *was* possible and could be only effectuated through Jesus Christ, God's Son. Again my mind recoiled. All that I had been taught as a Muslim began to come to the forefront of my thinking. How can Jesus be God's Son? Did God have a wife? How can you say that a mere man is God? All these questions, and more I asked. Then I told her that she was sadly mistaken and that Jesus was only a man and only a prophet - and *not* God.

In the midst of that discussion, I received a telephone call. It was a work colleague asking me if I would like to attend a church meeting. I reluctantly said yes. When I put the phone down, the lady, who had over heard some of my conversation, asked what church I had been invited to. It just so happened that it was the same church that she had been attending. When she found out that I was to attend one of the young peoples' group she said, "Something wonderful is going to happen to you." What. I'm going to become a Christian like you? I replied sarcastically.

Several weeks later, I attended a church service and was very surprised to find so many 'ordinary' young people in attendance. This service was nothing like the highly ritualistic services that I had seen back in England. But that wasn't all that surprised me. As the preacher began to relate his former life, experiences and vices, it was as if he was painting a picture of my own life. Then he began to speak of the awful and fearful Holiness of God, of His hatred of sin and his settled disposition of wrath against it and how there would be a Day of Reckoning, a fearful and dreadful Day of God's out poured wrath upon the ungodly. I became aware of a holy presence, searching and exposing my heart and mind, showing me the depth of my depravity and corruptness of nature. This was accompanied with an increasing conviction of my sinfulness and of fear of the judgement that was to come.

Then the sweetest words, that my ears have ever heard, were spoken. This man spoke, according to the Bible, of this holy, just and righteous God also being merciful, gracious, compassionate and forgiving, who on his own initiative and based upon his love, divine will and good pleasure, had accomplished a work of redemption, whereby sinful man could be reconciled to an infinitely holy God. This work of redemption was accomplished through the righteous life, atoning death, miraculous resurrection and glorious ascension of God's eternal Son, who willing took upon himself our frail humanity, except the aspect

of sin, and willingly bore the curse and penalty of sinful humanity upon the cross, thereby vindicating God's justice and demonstrating his tender mercy to the ungodly. And all that God was requiring was that we respond in repentance towards him and faith in Jesus Christ.

As I heard these words, I felt torn between believing what I had been taught as a Muslim, about the Person and ministry of Christ, and what I was now hearing. It seemed as half of me was wanting to believe what was being preached and the other half was holding to my past beliefs. In other words, I felt an internal battle raging and taking place deep within my mind and spirit. I eventually left that meeting knowing that what I had heard was true. I had a great need for a saviour and was being presented by God with a Great Saviour for my need. Yet despite all of this, I felt a certain reservation and withheld my full acceptance of the Lordship and Saviourhood of Christ.

Several weeks later, however, I attended another meeting, where once again I heard the Gospel being preached, and it was there that God granted me the ability to repent and the power to believe in the Person and glorious works of Jesus Christ. I knew, without a shadow of doubt that my sins were graciously pardoned, and sensed an internal transformation and an awakening to God and a desire to know, love, serve, obey and worship my most blessed Creator and Redeemer. For as it is written;

"We also were once foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Saviour and his love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:3-7)

Since that most glorious day, in July of '86, I have grown in my desire to glorify the God of my salvation, to love, obey, serve and worship him, who so willingly died for me upon the cross of Calvary, to declare that "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved," (Acts 4:12), and "that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," (Philippians 2:10-11).

Therefore, may I urge you, dear reader, to flee the wrath that is to come; seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Forsake your wicked ways and your evil thoughts. Turn to the LORD and He will have mercy on you, and to our God, for He will freely pardon you. (Isaiah 55:6-7)

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were

still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:6-9)

Man of Sorrows! What a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Guilty, vile and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He:
Full atonement-can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Lifted up was He to die.
It is finished! was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high;
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Yours In the Precious name of Jesus Christ,

Adel Mohammed El Naggar