

[“Apostasy or the Pilgrimage of Hajj Magdi from the Mosque to the Church”](#)

Author : Jacob Thomas on Nov 12, 2008 - 01:21 AM

By Jacob Thomas

There are a few signs of hope coming from the Arab-Muslim world. One of these is the growth of Arabic-language websites that advocate modernization of society and renewal of the Arab mind. Recently, I came across a new website, www.alawan.org that carried an article about the conversion and baptism of a well-known Egyptian intellectual, *Magdi ‘Allam*.

I would like to share with the readers of FFI, several parts of this provocative and outspoken critique. The author’s intent is to highlight the lack of reciprocity in the relations between Islam and the West. Witness the fact that Muslims living in large numbers in Europe and the Americas, have become more and more vocal in their demands for the right to live and act as Muslims. At the same time non-Muslims living within *Daru’l Islam*, have hardly any rights at all compared to the native Muslim populations. This is especially observable in the area of religious conversions. While Muslims rejoice and beat their drums for any Christian, Jew, Hindu, or Buddhist, who converts to Islam, they are adamantly intolerant toward any member of the Islamic Umma who dares to forsake Allah’s religion and become a member of another faith. Such a person is regarded as having committed the unpardonable sin of “*radda*” (apostasy), and will be punished by the forfeit of life itself. Finding refuge in the West is the only escape hatch.

The writer, who is most likely an Algerian intellectual living in France, began with this introduction:

“The word *radda* carries the meaning of a criminal act. Had Arab society been evolving according to the principles of the 21st century, this term would have disappeared on its own (or automatically) from the dictionary. For why should we consider a person who changes his mind a criminal? Is it rational to force a person born into a Muslim family, to remain a Muslim against his will? Doesn’t he have the right to transcend the religion in which he was born? Do we inherit our worldview the way we inherit a sheep? How can we charge a person with apostasy simply because we supposed that he was a Muslim? Did he break a covenant? Doesn’t he have the right to defend himself, and ask “*Who ever told you that I was a Muslim willingly, by my own choice?*” Even if a person has been a devout Muslim, doesn’t he have the right to rethink his own Islam? Should that hurt others, if he embarked on such a course? Can Muslims really be more concerned about an individual than he actually is?

“The advocates of *Usooliyya* (1) are extremely eager to spread the good news about the multitude of *Kuffar* who are embracing Islam. They brag about the Islamization of a

European or an American, even the most insignificant one. I remember when Cat Stephens came to Algiers, declared his embracing of Islam, changed his name to Yousef Islam, and stopped his singing performances for a time. His “apostasy” was exploited in Algeria, and was used to enlist many young men in the Islamist movement, *FIS (Islamic Salvation Front)*. Didn’t the mouthpiece of *FIS, al-Munqidh*, (2) print on its front page and with large letters, a report claiming that the star Michael Jackson had also embraced Allah’s religion?

“When some Christians embrace Islam, the claim is made that it is due to Allah’s guidance. On the other hand, when a Muslim converts to the religion of the Messiah, he is considered as one who has gone astray! This is a concrete example of how Muslims use two different standards. They rejoice at the conversion of others and consider such events as a victory for Allah’s religion. However, any person who leaves the religion of Muhammad is treated as a criminal, an apostate who has forfeited the right to live! They celebrate the supposedly thousands who are embracing Islam, but cannot tolerate just one person who has embraced the religion of Jesus!

“Attempts to keep Muslims from leaving Islam have not been successful. For example, in France, a country well-known for its secular culture, every year around 200 Muslims publicly embrace Christianity!

“Al-Azhar University welcomes anyone who wants to embrace Islam. Huge amounts of money are spent worldwide by organizations funded by Islamic countries in “*da’wa*” in order to Islamize Christians and others. But in Islamic countries, it is absolutely forbidden to engage in efforts to persuade Muslims to embrace other religions. At the same time loud voices constantly proclaim the tolerance of Islam and Muslims, and criticize Western intolerance.

“If a person is found in possession of the Holy Bible, he is immediately charged with attempting to evangelize Muslims. The very word “evangelize” has assumed a pejorative meaning in Islam. The odd thing is that when a person embraces Islam, he is regarded as one who has thought the matter through and arrived at his decision after proper deliberation, with the help of Allah. But when a Muslim chooses to become a Christian, he is regarded as one who has been led astray by missionaries and Satan, and will ultimately be among the lost.

“Did Satan really impact the mind of the 55-year old Egyptian author *Magdi ‘Allam*, who was baptized by Pope Benedict XVI on 22 March, 2008? And why should he be threatened with death, for making some criticisms of Islam? Mr. *‘Allam*, who teaches sociology in Rome and writes for the major Italian newspaper, *Manifesto Repubblica*, declared, “*Those who consider the change in my convictions as treason are actually betraying the freedom of belief and thought.*” He did not embrace Christianity haphazardly, but it was the fruit of a long period of serious thought and maturity. He encountered Christianity at an early age. His mother, who worked for a rich Catholic family, enrolled him in a Catholic school at the age of four. From then on, he became well acquainted with Catholicism. “*My teachers at the school offered me more than*

knowledge; they enabled me to appreciate moral visions based on a consciousness of duty and responsibility.”

“Even though he went with his mother on the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1991, by the year 2000 he had become well-known as a strong defender of human rights and an open critic of Islam, which he regards as opposed to global values. In July 2007, he organized a massive demonstration in Rome to protest the persecution and forced immigration of Middle East Christians. He opposed the building of mosques in Italy, and deplored the Islamization that was going on in European societies. In 2004, he was a member of a delegation of “moderate Muslims” who were received by the President of Italy after they had published their manifesto ***“Against Irhab, and For Life.”*** Soon afterwards, he began to rethink his religious position. ***“When the Irhabis began to commit their crimes in the name of Islam,”*** he said, ***“I could no longer believe in the existence of “moderate Islam.”*** He went on to explain, ***“I do differentiate between Islam and Muslims, I believe in the possibility of dialogue with moderate Muslims; but how can they deserve ‘a certificate of moderation?’ They must denounce the mass murder of Christians in Muslim lands, the Law of Apostasy (known as Radda,) discrimination against women, and affirm the right of Israel to exist.”***

“What caused ***Hajj Magdi ‘Allam*** to move from the mosque to the church? ***“I have been liberated from an obscurantist ideology that permitted lying, taqiyya (dissimulation,) violence, suicide, and murder.”*** That was how Mr. ‘Allam described his former religion.

His words and action angered many who consider themselves defenders of Islam. But most of their anger was directed against Pope Benedict XVI, who officiated at ‘Allam’s public baptism. In a letter to the Pope, the director of the **Strategic Center for Islamic Studies** in Jordan, deplored the Pope’s action and considered it as a ***“premeditated and provocative act.”***

“The Algerian Islamologist, ***Mustapha al-Cherif***, was astonished that the Pope personally presided over the baptism of a person who is well-known for his radical hatred and attacks on Islam. I am shocked by the words of this Algerian intellectual. After all, he has never uttered one word against the shocking situation in his country, (3) while at the same time he poses as an advocate for dialogue among world religions! When he was the minister for higher education, he remained silent about the transformation of several areas within Algiers’ University into student mosques, and allowed the university campus to become a sanctuary for radical Islamists!

“Muslims behave as if they possess rights that others shouldn’t have. After all, aren’t they the best ***Umma*** that has ever existed? While they praise “others” who convert to Islam, they would kill anyone who dreams of leaving the ***Umma*** to join another community of faith!

“One last world. Could it be that the public baptism of ***Magdi ‘Allam*** was a clear message from the Pope to ***al-Azhar*** announcing the birth of a new era? Perhaps now the

Church will become less reticent, and more openly welcome Muslims who decide to embrace Christianity? Isn't it high time to practice *quid pro quo*?"

On that note the article in "Al-Awan" ends. It is gratifying to read thoughtful pieces like this. One caveat I believe deserves mentioning, however. The author perhaps over-generalized by referring to conversions to Islam by entertainers like Cat Stephens and Michael Jackson as leaving Christianity for Islam. Many Christians would hesitate to refer to such people as Christians. Being born in a Western country does not necessarily mean they are Christian.

http://www.alawan.org/?page=articles&op=print_preview&article_id=1804

A note about the website, *al-awan*

This website which began in March, 2007, describes itself as "*an Intellectual and Educational site.*" Its motto is, "*Toward a Rational, Secular, and Enlightened Culture.*" It is headquartered in Paris, France.

The choice of the name, *al-awan*

The Arabic word *awan* has the same meaning as the Greek word *kairos*. It points to the qualitative meaning of time, rather than its chronological sense. The choice of the name for this website indicates that the organizers believe that it is "*high time*" to get rid of the age-long obscurantist and hegemonic worldview that has afflicted Islam for centuries.

"**Kairos** (καιρός) is an [ancient Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kairos) word meaning the right or opportune moment. The ancient Greeks had two words for time, [chronos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronos) and kairos. While the former refers to chronological or sequential time, the latter signifies a time in between, a moment of undetermined period of time in which something special happens. What the special something is depends on who is using the word. While chronos is quantitative, kairos has a qualitative nature." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kairos>

1. Usooliyya signifies an attachment to the early expositions of the Islamic worldview. It is derived from *Usool*, roots, or basics.

2. Al-Munqidh, the *Deliverer*!

3. Reference here is to the unending violence that was launched by the radical Islamist group, *Front Islamique to Salut* (FIS) against the Algerian Military Government in 1991. Since then, over 100,000 Algerians have lost their lives due to the murderous acts of a group that has arrogated to itself the name of "*Islamic Salvation Front.*"