



**A MUSLIM PREACHER CONVERTS
TO
ORTHODOXY**



Day of Judgment

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February 26, 2010 by [Fr. Johannes Jacobse](#) ·

The interview was presumably conducted in English, posted in Russian [here](#), translated to French [here](#) by Claude Lopez-Ginisty, whence the present translation.

We're speaking in London with a new Orthodox Christian who was baptized today with the name

Daniel. Daniel is not a Muslim name, far from it [actually, it does exist as a Muslim name, but it's quite rare]. Although information about his conversion will inevitably circulate among the Muslims of London, for reasons of security we will not deliberately give details about this subject because there are very often cases of threats and violence and sometimes even murders perpetrated by fanatics. That said, Daniel's experience is very precious for the Orthodox. Fr. Nicholas Savtchenko, interim rector of the [Church of the Dormition](#) (ROCOR) in London speaks with him.

Daniel, please tell us about yourself.

For many years I was a zealous Muslim, as were my wife and children. I was born in the UK, but during my life I have travelled a lot in Muslim countries. I knew both British and Muslim culture. I lived in Saudi Arabia, where I studied theology and contributed to the Muslim mission among foreign laborers. I also spent time in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban, in Pakistan, and in the Pakistani part of Kashmir. I also spent time in Bosnia. In recent years, I've been living with my family in London, where, some time ago, I became the Muslim representative in a well-known inter-religious organization dedicated to peace. For the past two years, I was an advisor on Islam to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Two days ago, I called him to tell him I was entering Orthodoxy in the Russian Church.

What was his attitude?

Oh... The Archbishop of Canterbury was very happy. Once, he told me that recently two of his employees in the personnel department of the Anglican Church had been received into Orthodox churches: he respects their choice and they will continue their work in the administration of the Anglican Church.

What led you to Christ?

The first time that I had the desire to study the New Testament in detail was when I was in front of the Kaaba in Mecca—I lived for a time in Mecca. Christian literature is strictly prohibited in Saudi Arabia and many websites are even blocked, but with the development of modern communications, it is not difficult for those who are looking to find the Word of God. After a time, I tried to convince an American who was working in the Saudi capital to convert to Islam. When I spoke to him, he responded with much courage and conviction. I was surprised by his courage, because in Saudi Arabia a man who preaches Christianity can easily be killed. Conversations with Christians in Saudi Arabia were very important for me. As someone associated with the Islamic mission in Arabia, I encountered many foreigners. I always remarked that in most cases, people converted to Islam, not because it was their free choice, but in order to keep working in Saudi Arabia and to obtain a release from the taxes imposed on non-Muslims. The fact is that the salaries of non-Muslims are lower than those of Muslims because of the need to pay a special tax, set by Muhammad. Salaries for Christians in Saudi Arabia are rather low, and some convert to Islam in order to earn more money. The majority of Filipinos who return home immediately renounce Islam. I began to explore Christianity even more and, little by little, I sensed its superiority over Islam. I first consciously encountered Orthodoxy in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. Unfortunately, the priests in Sarajevo did not speak English and I could not really express what I wanted. After waiting for a group of Imams to pass by, I went into the Serbian church and I felt the astonished look of the Serbian priest when I made the sign of the cross in the Orthodox way and I made a prostration onto the ground. Then I knew that Orthodoxy was, of all the Christian confessions, the closest to me. I studied Christianity and Orthodoxy even more, reading books and watching films. I also liked the movie *Ostrov* (the Island). Slowly, I decided to ask for baptism in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Finally, we hear growing reports of the propagation of Christian missions in Muslim countries. Is it considerable in these countries?

I agree that there are many secret Christians in Saudi Arabia. Several times I myself have encountered people who were probably secret Christians. We need to understand that in Saudi Arabia and other countries, maybe the majority of Muslims go to the mosque not because their faith

encourages them to, but because they are obliged to do so under the pressure of laws and customs. Visiting the mosque becomes a burden. Muslims of today are rather less religious than people in the Christian world believe. In Muslim countries, there are many mosques and they say prayers there five times a day, but besides on Friday no one goes to the mosque. Other than on Friday, in any mosque at the time of prayer, you won't see more than five men, even though there are many homes inhabited by Muslims around it. Most Muslims don't go to the mosque even on Friday. Some start going during Ramadan, but after the fast they disappear until the next year. In the mosque, once a week during Ramadan there are maybe a hundred people, even though there could be thousands, and after Ramadan there won't be more than five people. In Muslim countries, many people search for truth and it's because of this that the Christian mission will grow. Most promote Christianity among friends, and recently there have been television networks and many more internet sites dedicated to mission among Muslims. In general, many Muslims distance themselves from Islam and this is especially visible in Western countries. In Great Britain, many Muslims have converted to Christianity. In the Anglican Church, Muslims who have adopted Christianity are estimated at a hundred thousand people. Many of them are Pakistanis. They have their own Christian churches and are forced to hide because of the danger of reprisals from the Muslims. There are also Arab and Bengali converts to Christianity. Very many convert because of mixed marriages.

Recently in the press there have been reports about the strong growth of Islam in western countries and they have even claimed that the number of Muslim faithful will soon overtake the number of parishioners in Christian churches. It seems strange that the press has mentioned the number of Muslims, of faithful in mosques, many times greater than the capacity of the mosques themselves! But that is not mentioned in the press. What is the truth?

The presence of mosques in the UK is very weak. Most Muslims won't ever go to a mosque. The young people have effectively left Islam, even if they say that they're still Muslims. In the mosques they don't find a common language with the Imams from Pakistan or Bangladesh. Young people can barely speak Urdu or Bengali but only English. Many are ashamed of Islam because of terrorism. Our inter-religious council investigated mosque attendance and we know what the real picture is and it is especially alarming for Islam, but it is to the advantage of certain people to present Islam as an immense force. If one takes the list of mosques in Muslim publications, for example, in West London, we find that there are twenty mosques and much free space in each of these mosques, even though the number of people of Muslim origins in London is such that they would need even more mosques if a majority went. In one large mosque in London there might be three hundred people for Friday prayers. Many mosques are just small halls that are only used on Friday. In general, believers are very rare in mosques and most are children who bring their parents. When they grow, they disappear. Christianity offers a free choice, thus it is much better adapted to life in a climate of tolerance, and Islam is unable to pass this test.

The media talks about the adoption of Islam by many British people. Muslims make an almost triumphant image of Islam in the West. However, the real number of British in the Muslim population is very small, only around 1200 people. How do you understand this contradiction?

It is not a simple question. I was a part of the Islamic mission to the British and I can say that the number of converts is minimal. At Friday prayers in the center of London, the number of British Muslims at the mosque is maybe one percent. Outside of London, they don't even reach this number. All the Muslims know the real number of converts to Islam. There are those who accept Islam because of marriage to Muslims. These British will never go to mosques and their acceptance of Islam is a formality. Very often they remain in practice Christians. Most of those who accept Islam because of marriage are women. Additionally, many descendants of Muslims immigrants to Britain consider themselves British but could not be considered to be 'British Muslims' in the full sense. I've spoken a lot to women who divorced their Muslim husbands, and I can say from memory that in London there are maybe 25 British women who have remained Muslim after divorcing their Muslim husband. But, as a general rule, mixed marriages lead to an estrangement

from Islam. The Islamic mission in the West has not been successful. In London, there is an organization of missionaries dedicated to the preaching of Islam. They are mostly youths. But, they realize their mission among Muslim immigrants because it's much more effective, and the British do not convert to Islam. When some Muslims say that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, London imams say that this growth is primarily because of the fertility rate, but there is no real mission. I do not doubt that Christianity is much stronger in terms of mission.

Are there many Muslims who convert to Christianity in Great Britain?

On the one hand, there are very many. This happens without any publicity. In effect, according to most schools of Islam an apostate from Islam should be executed, even though the imams of the chief mosques of London say that they cannot be executed for apostasy from Islam.

However, on the other hand, we can say that there are very few, since many Muslims simply abandon their faith and become unbelievers. Unbelief is an illness common to all. Certain Muslims try to present atheism and the absence of religion as characteristics of Christian civilization, but Muslims themselves, even more than Christians, lose their faith in the Western world. However, there is the very good example of Russia and the other Orthodox countries where the Church is growing, even with freedom of choice. I hope one day to go to Russia, but in the meantime I need to rebuild my life as an Orthodox Christian.

