

Minds That Embraced Islam (Scholars, Thinkers, and Writers)

Islam was not merely a religion people were born into; rather, it attracted many brilliant minds, prominent thinkers, and writers who influenced their societies through their ideas and creativity. In this section, we highlight some of the most notable figures who embraced Islam or gave their testimonies about Islam and the Holy Qur'an, whose works and thoughts have left a lasting and unforgettable mark.

Among them:

1. Maurice Bucaille

Born: July 19, 1920, in Pont-l'Évêque, France

Died: February 17, 1998

Upbringing: Raised Catholic

Scientific and Professional Career:

- A French physician specializing in medicine and surgery.
- Head of the medical clinic at the University of Paris.

Reason for Embracing Islam:

- He was assigned to medically examine a mummy (believed to be that of Pharaoh).
- He was astonished by the correspondence between the Qur'anic description of Pharaoh's drowning and the preservation of his body (Surah Yunus: 92) and modern scientific findings.
- This led him to study the relationship between modern scientific knowledge and the Qur'anic text.

Notable Work:

- *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (1976), translated into many languages.

Notable Statement:

“The Qur'an is beyond the scientific level of the Arabs, beyond the scientific level of the world, beyond the scientific level of scholars in later ages, and beyond our advanced scientific level in the twentieth century. It cannot have come from an illiterate man—this proves the prophethood of Muhammad and that he was a prophet receiving revelation.”

2. Keith L. Moore

Born: October 5, 1925 – Brantford, Ontario, Canada

Died: November 25, 2019

Scientific Career:

- Professor of Anatomy and Embryology.
- Professor Emeritus, Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto.
- Head of the Department of Anatomy (1976–1984).
- Associate Dean of Basic Medical Sciences.
- Founding member and president of the American Association of Clinical Anatomists.

Views on the Qur'an:

Although there is debate about whether he formally embraced Islam, he is considered one of the most prominent Western scientists who addressed the relationship between science and the Qur'an.

He believed that Qur'anic verses related to embryology contain remarkable scientific insights.

He stated:

“References to human reproduction and development are scattered throughout the Qur'an.”

And added:

“The interpretation of the verses related to human development was not possible in the seventh century, nor even a hundred years ago.”

Reason for His Conviction:

- He found that Qur'anic terms such as *'alaqah* (clinging substance) and *mudghah* (chewed-like substance) accurately describe stages of embryonic development.
- He considered this more advanced than ancient Greek theories.

Contributions:

- Revised his famous book *The Developing Human* to include Qur'anic references.

"The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology with Islamic Additions"

- Published a special edition in 1983 incorporating Islamic perspectives.

Scientific Engagement with the Muslim World:

- Invited in 1980 to lecture at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah.
- Participated in committees studying Qur'anic verses on embryology.

Notable Statements:

“I was amazed at the accuracy of what was recorded in the 7th century, before embryology was established.”

“This proves to me that Muhammad must have been a messenger of God.”

3. Roger Garaudy

Born: July 17, 1913, Marseille, France

Died: June 13, 2012

Upbringing:

Raised by a Catholic mother and an atheist father; converted to Protestantism at age 14.

Academic and Political Career:

- Studied at the University of Marseille and Aix-en-Provence.
- Appointed Professor of Philosophy in 1937.
- Elected to the French Parliament in 1945.
- PhD in Philosophy from the Sorbonne (1953).
- Second doctorate on freedom from Moscow University (1954).

Reason for Embracing Islam:

- Journeyed intellectually from Christianity to Marxism, then to Islam.
- Found in Islam a civilizational project combining science and moral values.
- Described his conversion not as a break, but as a “completion” of his intellectual journey.

Declaration of Islam:

Announced his conversion on July 2, 1982, at the Islamic Center in Geneva.

Notable Works:

- *Promises of Islam*
 - *Islam Habite Notre Avenir* (Islam Dwells in Our Future)
 - *How I Became Muslim: Half a Century in Search of Truth*
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4. Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss)

Born: July 2, 1900, in Lviv (formerly Lemberg), then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Ukraine)

Died: February 20, 1992, in Spain; buried in Granada

Education and Professional Career:

He studied philosophy at the University of Vienna and later worked as a foreign correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. After embracing Islam, he dedicated himself to serving the Muslim world. He worked as a legal adviser and as Pakistan’s representative to the United Nations, and contributed to the drafting of its constitution.

Story of His Conversion:

He was raised in the Jewish faith, and his conversion to Islam came as a result of deep reflection on the contradiction between Western materialism and spiritual emptiness. A turning point occurred when he read Surah *At-Takathur*, where he realized the danger of being preoccupied with worldly life at the expense of true human meaning.

He described his experience by saying:

“Islam came to me like a light, slipping quietly into my heart, to remain there forever. What drew me to it was that harmonious and complete structure which is beyond description.”

A Defining Moment in His Journey:

At first, he found the physical movements of prayer puzzling. He said:

“I was perplexed when I saw a prayer consisting of seemingly mechanical movements, so I asked the imam:

Do you really believe that God expects you to demonstrate your faith through repeated bowing and prostration?

Would it not be better to look within yourself and pray to your Lord silently with your heart?”

The imam replied:

“By what means do you think we can worship God? Did He not create both the soul and the body?

And since He created us as both body and soul, should we not pray with both?”

He then went on to explain the meaning behind the movements of prayer—an explanation that became the first gateway to his acceptance of Islam.

Notable Works:

Among his most famous works is *The Road to Mecca*. He also produced a distinguished English translation of the meanings of the Qur’an. He is considered one of the leading intellectuals of the twentieth century who contributed to building a cultural and intellectual bridge between the East and the West.

5. Jeffrey Lang

Born: January 30, 1954 – Bridgeport, Connecticut, United States

Academic Career:

Professor of Mathematics at the University of Kansas.

He holds:

- A Master’s degree
- A PhD (1981) from Purdue University

Intellectual and Religious Background:

- Born into a Roman Catholic family
- Received his early education in Catholic schools
- At the age of 18, he became an atheist due to questions about:
 - The existence of evil and suffering
 - The justice and mercy of God

Journey to Islam:

His journey began while working as a lecturer in mathematics at the University of San Francisco. There, he met Muslim students and engaged in deep discussions with them. He later obtained a copy of the Qur'an and read it independently, finding in it answers to his intellectual questions.

He eventually embraced Islam.

His Perspective:

He believes that the mathematical mindset is inclined toward strict logic. Despite this, he found that Islam:

- Appeals to reason
- Is compatible with logical thinking

He concluded that faith in Islam is based on understanding rather than blind submission.

Notable Works:

- *Struggling to Surrender*
- *Even Angels Ask: A Journey to Islam in America*

6. Gary Miller (Abd al-Ahad Omar)

Academic Career:

He earned a PhD in Mathematics and Logic from the University of Toronto, Canada, and was also admitted to a Master's program at Queen's University. He worked as a university professor specializing in mathematics and logic.

Story of His Conversion to Islam:

He was a Christian priest and an active missionary for fifteen years. Using his scientific approach, he decided to study the Qur'an to find errors to critique. However, the results were the opposite of what he expected; he was amazed by the coherence and greatness of its content. He had anticipated finding an ancient text limited to discussing the desert environment, but he discovered topics and dimensions not present in any other book.

What particularly caught his attention was that the Qur'an does not go into the personal hardships of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) (PBUH), such as the death of his wife Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) or his children, while it contains an entire Surah named after Mary (peace be upon her), elevating her status in a way unparalleled in the Gospels. He also noted that Jesus' name (Peace Be Upon Him) (PBUH) appears twenty-five times in the Qur'an, whereas Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) name appears only four times, which he saw as evidence that the Qur'an is not of human origin.

All of this led him to believe that the Qur'an is a divine revelation. He embraced Islam in 1978 and adopted the name Abd al-Ahad Omar, explaining his choice by saying:

“What attracted me to this religion is the clarity of its creed, a clarity I could not find elsewhere.”

After His Conversion:

He became active in Islamic dawah through lectures and television programs and authored his renowned book *The Amazing Quran*, considered one of the leading works in this field.

7. Bruno Guiderdoni

Birth: September 30, 1958 – France

Academic Career:

- Astrophysicist.
- Research Director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS).
- Member of the Lyon Center for Astrophysical Research (CRAL).
- Director of the Lyon Observatory (2005–2015).
- Specialized in galaxy formation and cosmic evolution.
- Published over 140 scientific papers and organized international conferences.

Intellectual Background:

- Born into a nominally Christian family without strict religious upbringing.
- Developed an early interest in philosophy and existential questions.
- He felt that purely materialistic explanations could not answer the major questions regarding:
 - The purpose of existence
 - The meaning of life and destiny

Reason for Embracing Islam:

He converted to Islam in 1987, adopting the name Abd al-Haqq. He found that:

- Science answers the question “How?”
 - Religion answers the question “Why?”
- He saw in Islam:

- A comprehensive vision of the unity and harmony of the universe.
- Alignment with the concept of fine-tuning in the cosmos.
- A spiritual dimension that made him feel that his conversion was a “return to home”

Scientific Perspective:

He strives to connect:

- Scientific models of cosmic evolution.
- Islamic philosophy and the Qur’anic view of creation.
He believes that:
- Science provides understanding.
- Faith gives that understanding meaning and purpose.

Documentation:

- His scientific research has been published in French research institutions.
- He has participated in programs such as *Islam and Science* on French television.
- Numerous academic references discuss his life and intellectual transformation.

8. Murad Wilfried Hofmann

A prominent German diplomat and thinker whose conversion to Islam caused a stir in European political circles.

Born: July 6, 1931

Died: January 12, 2020, in Bonn

Academic Degrees:

- PhD in Law from the University of Munich (1957)
- Master’s degree in American Law from Harvard University (1960)

Professional Career:

- Director of Information at NATO in Brussels
- German Ambassador to Algeria and Morocco

Story of His Conversion:

He was influenced by the courage and ethics of the Algerian people during their struggle against French colonialism. He also observed their inner spiritual tranquility despite suffering. He found in Islam a rational and logical faith free from theological complexity. He rejected the divinity of Christ and considered the decision of the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) to be more political than theological.

After Embracing Islam:

He adopted a rational approach to understanding religion and became an advocate for a logical and intellectual understanding of Islam, emphasizing its coherence compared to what he had seen in Christianity.

9. Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Sirajuddin)

Born: January 24, 1909, Burnage, Manchester, England

Died: May 12, 2005, London

Upbringing: Protestant family

Academic and Professional Career:

- BA in English Language and Literature, Magdalen College, Oxford
- Taught Anglo-Saxon and Middle English at Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania)
- Curator of Oriental Manuscripts at the British Museum and British Library
- Specialist in Shakespearean studies
- Student of the Swiss philosopher Frithjof Schuon

Notable Work:

- The book: *"Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources"* (1983), considered one of the most important modern English biographies of the Prophet and still widely printed today.
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10. Abdul Karim Germanus (Julius Germanus)

A renowned Hungarian orientalist and professor of Eastern languages.

Born: November 6, 1884

Died: November 7, 1979

Origin: Budapest, Hungary

Languages He Mastered:

Greek, Latin, English, French, Italian, Hungarian, Persian, Urdu, Arabic, and Turkish.

Specialization:

- Linguistics and Islamic history
- Professor at the University of Budapest
- Member of Arabic Language Academies in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad

Reason for Embracing Islam:

He began as an orientalist studying Islam from an external perspective. However, his deep study of Arabic and the eloquence of the Qur'an led him to believe that it could not be a human text.

He mentions in his memoirs a spiritual experience in the Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul that made him realize the essence of monotheism.

Notable Works:

- The book: "*Light of the East*".
 - Various academic articles about his journey to Islam.
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11. Arthur Ellison (Abdullah Ellison)

Arthur James Ellison, later known as Abdullah Ellison.

Born: January 15, 1920 – United Kingdom

Died: September 6, 2000

Academic and Professional Career:

- Professor and Head of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at City University, London (1972–1985)
- Founded the First International Conference on Electrical Machines (1974)
- First elected president of the conference (1974–1984)
- Board member of the British Society for Psychical Research

Reason for Embracing Islam:

He studied states of consciousness during sleep and their relation to death from a scientific perspective.

Dr. Muhammad Yahya Al-Sharafi introduced him to the Qur'anic verse (Az-Zumar: 42):

"Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that do not die [He takes] during their sleep; then He keeps those for which He has decreed death and releases the others until a specified term."

He was astonished by its alignment with his research, which led him to further study and eventually embrace Islam.

Declaration of Islam:

He announced his conversion to Islam in 1985 at the conclusion of the final session of the medical conference, in front of the participants, after presenting his joint research paper with Dr. Al-Sharafi.

12. Lord Headley (Rowland Allanson-Winn)

Born: January 19, 1855 – London, England

Died: June 22, 1935

Career:

- British civil engineer and politician, a member of the nobility (5th Earl of Headley)
- Studied civil engineering at Cambridge University
- Expert in dam construction and coastal defenses

Reason for Embracing Islam:

- Found Islam simple and rational
- Considered it free from ecclesiastical complexity
- Saw it as compatible with:
 - Empirical science
 - Engineering logic based on cause and effect

Notable Work:

- The book: *A Western Awakening to Islam* (published in 1914).
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13. Vincent-Mansour Monteil

Born: May 27, 1913 – Billac, France

Died: February 27, 2005 – Paris

Overview:

A prominent French orientalist, military officer, and scholar of Arabic and Islamic history.

Conversion to Islam:

- He was raised Catholic, but he did not find sufficient clarity in Christian doctrine, especially regarding concepts such as the Trinity, redemption, and original sin. During his studies and long engagement with the Islamic world, he began to develop a different understanding of religion.
- Through long engagement with the Muslim world, he developed a different understanding of religion.
- He stated that the Qur'an helped him to reinterpret Christian history, noting that early Christians were not far from the Islamic concept and were closer to monotheism. He believed that the deification of Christ came later as a result of historical developments, and that Christ was not considered divine until the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. (How can a doctrinal matter such as the divinity of Christ be decided by a vote under the pressure of a pagan emperor?! In that council, it was determined—by a majority of votes—that Christ is divine; had the votes been fewer, Christ would have remained, in Christianity, merely human, just as Islam teaches.)
- After nearly thirty years of research and travel in Muslim lands, he announced his conversion to Islam in 1977 and adopted the name “Mansour” in addition to his own.
- He rejected the idea of original sin, thereby aligning with what the Holy Qur'an states about Adam: “Then his Lord chose him, turned to him in forgiveness, and guided him.” Thus, he did not find in Islam any notion of inherited guilt as imposed in Christianity.

His Statement:

He explained that his choice of Islam was due to the clarity of its beliefs, its tolerance, and its high moral values. He said:

“I chose Islam as the religion with which I will meet my Lord, because I found in it remarkable tolerance, noble morals, and a faith that preserves human dignity.”

Summary:

Vincent Monteil represents a model of an orientalist who devoted his life to studying Islam and Arab civilization, and whose intellectual journey ultimately led him to embrace Islam with deep conviction.

Conclusion

Many more, beyond those mentioned here, have embraced Islam, using wisely and effectively the gift of intellect that Allah, the Exalted, bestowed upon them.

We provide here only a brief summary of what has been highlighted, while one can explore this topic in greater depth by consulting specialized Islamic libraries and sources.

All praise is due to Allah for the blessing of Islam, guidance, and success. We ask Allah, the Exalted, to open the hearts of all His servants to Islam and to following the best of creation, the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers, Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) (PBUH).