

# A Swedish Pastor Converts to Islam



In his 2015 novel, [\*Submission\*](#), Michel Houellebecq depicts a France of the near future in which a Muslim party has gained political power and, virtually overnight, transformed the Republic into an Islamic state. The change takes place with remarkable smoothness, and with little resistance, as our protagonist, a Paris professor, and his male, gentile colleagues quietly convert to Islam to keep their jobs. (The women and Jews, of course, are summarily dismissed.)

It's a powerfully chilling read. And I felt a not dissimilar chill when I watched *Bekjennelsen* (*Confession*), a Swedish

Television documentary by Tomas Blideman and Alex Bolevin that just premiered in Norway. It's about Leif Skjetne, a phlegmatic Norwegian pastor who at age 75, after almost 40 years as a clergyman in the Church of Sweden, is, as he puts it in the program's opening minutes, "in the process of becoming a Muslim."

As recently as two years ago, says Leif, he still believed in Jesus Christ. What exactly happened since then? He says he began asking himself: "Do I really believe this?" But losing faith is one thing; changing faiths is another. Why Islam? The answer starts with Muslim refugees. "I've worked with a lot of refugees," Leif says. One day, one of them asked him, "Do you have to be retired to be a member of the Swedish church?" When we see Leif's congregation, the question makes sense. Everybody's old.

One refugee in particular played a key role in Leif's life. Recently, while Leif was on crutches, he was taken care of for three months by a young Moroccan guy. Abdellah was "incredibly nice" and they grew "very close." He obviously meant a lot to Leif, who has no spouse or children, no brothers or sisters, and apparently no close friends. He seems to be the sort of person who's led a very lonely life. He comes off as a closet case, although his sexuality is never addressed.

Abdellah, a devout Muslim, was surprised that Leif, a pastor in the Church of Sweden, never read the Bible and prayed only in church. Abdellah, for his part, prayed five times a day. "And gradually," says Leif, "I began to pray with him." Behind the backs of his church colleagues and congregation, Leif joined a mosque. He recited the words of the shahada – the Muslim declaration of faith. All the while, he continued to lead services of Christian worship.

Precisely what does it mean to Leif to be a Muslim? He never picked up his Bible at home: does he ever pick up a Quran? He says he no longer believes in the teachings summed up in the

Apostles' Creed: does he know that as a Muslim he's expected to believe in the literal truth of absolutely every statement of fact recorded in the Quran? Does he know that he's expected to support certain utterly abominable practices and punishments – such as the stoning to death of adulterers?

For heaven's sake, he's a Christian apostate. Does he know that the religion of Muhammed prescribes the death penalty for apostates from Islam?

And what about the role of Islam in today's world? Is he aware of the persecution – bordering on genocide – of Christians in the Muslim world? Surely he must know that the rise of Islam in Sweden has caused violent crime rates to skyrocket. Does this disturb him at all?

Unsurprisingly, the documentary never touches on any of these dicey questions.

Leif's own assertion that "morality is very important in Islam" suggests that there's a lot about Islam he doesn't know – or, perhaps, doesn't want to face up to. Meanwhile, he mindlessly parrots the Swedish-establishment tenet that Sweden is rife with "racism" and "Islamophobia."

To be sure, toward the end of the film Leif does make one contention about doctrine. Islam, he says, is "more logical" than Christianity, because it lacks the puzzling doctrine of the Trinity. In Islam, he says, "one God really *is* one God... Much simpler." Is this the only thing he knows about Islamic belief?

Perhaps the real question is: did Leif get converted to Islam – or to Abdellah?

In any event, it seems clear he never had a particularly strong Christian faith. This is par for the course for clergy in the traditional state churches of Scandinavia. A couple of months ago, Christofer Sjödin, a pastor in Umeå, told Radio

Sweden that because the Church of Sweden has more ecclesial buildings than it needs, they should be turned into mosques. To see those structures handed over to Muslims, he said, would be “terrific.”

Sjödin isn't alone. Plenty of pastors in Scandinavia are remarkably eager to replace anemic churches with dynamic mosques – and to incorporate Islamic prayers and symbols in Christian worship. A few years ago, Eva Brunne, a bishop in the Church of Sweden, wanted to replace a crucifix in a Stockholm church with an arrow pointing toward Mecca. In Europe, and especially in Sweden, a lot of Christian clergy seem to think it's somehow their Christian duty to cower and cringe and kowtow to Muslims.

Moreover, the number of European converts to Islam is large and growing. For example, the [Danish man who killed five](#) people on October 13 in Kongsberg, Norway, is a Muslim convert (although politicians, police, and media have tried to argue that he isn't *really* a Muslim, or at least that it's impolite to talk about it). **(READ MORE: [Massacre in Norway](#))**

Leif's story, then, is in a very real – and tragic – way the story of Christian Europe today.

To be sure, this documentary also shows us another kind of pastor. The head minister at Leif's church is, by all indications, a true believer. When Leif retires and says he's moving to Morocco – while still keeping his conversion to himself – the church throws him a dinner. In a farewell speech, his superior commends him for his deep faith. “And now that you're moving to Morocco, we know that you'll be taking that strong faith with you.”

Anyway, Leif discards his old life – “my sermons,” he says as he tosses a garbage bag into a dumpster – and moves to Tétouan, Morocco. Not having bothered to learn any Arabic, he gets by in English. He's already officially changed his name

to Ahmed Ekdou. In his new Moroccan home, we see him sitting around in a taqiya (cap) and djellaba (robe). He looks ridiculous. Is he living with Abdellah? The answer to that one isn't made clear.

In a phone call with the head minister and a couple of church ladies, Leif finally springs the news of his conversion. His former boss is visibly grieved by the news, and tries to understand it, charitably if bafflingly, as having been motivated by "humanitarian reasons, goodness, and Christian love." He calls Leif "the prodigal son." But shortly afterwards he admits Leif's conversion amounts to a betrayal.

One of the church ladies, Eva, seems to grasp what's going on. "You know Abdellah has a wife and children in Spain, don't you?" she asks Leif. Later, at the head minister's suggestion, Eva agrees to go to Morocco to try to talk Leif back into the fold. This part of the film – in which we witness the depth of these people's concern for the spiritual health of their "Christian brother" – is deeply moving.

Alas, the effort doesn't go well. When Eva arrives at Leif's home in Tétouan, sees his two dogs in the yard, and lets them inside, he gets angry – his only show of real emotion in the whole film – protesting that he can't enter a mosque with dog fur on his clothes. Eva notices that the dogs, whom he'd always taken good care of, now look undernourished. (In Islam, of course, dogs are *haram*.)

When they move on to the topic of Leif's conversion, it's her turn to get angry – and then teary-eyed. How, she pleads, can he cast Jesus aside, after so many years as a pastor? He doesn't have much to offer by way of an answer. It is what it is. What's curious, however, is this: he doesn't exude anything remotely resembling a convert's zeal.

On the contrary. He's blank, passive. Throughout the documentary, he comes off, frankly, as a wimp and a dimbulb,

and that hasn't changed. Is his whole conversion, one wonders, simply a matter of having gone over, before it's too late, and with utter pusillanimity, to the winning side in a clash of civilizations? It certainly feels like it. Looking at him in his absurd taqiya and djellaba – which make him resemble Mohandas Gandhi in his last years – I found myself thinking of the closing lines from T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper."

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