

Conversion from Catholicism to Islam in and out of Prison: A Comparative Study

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Abstract : This research examined the lived experiences and compared their similarities and differences of former Catholics turned Muslim converts in and out of prison. Qualitative comparative study with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach was used to explore the lives of Muslim converts. Interviews were conducted at Islamic Studies, Call and Guidance of the Philippines (ISCAG) and Tarbiyyah Islamic Female Institute for Muslim converts out of prison, New Bilibid Prison (NBP) and Correctional Institution for Women (CIW) for Muslim converts in prison. Results of the study show that first, for Muslim converts out of prison, exploration begins through (1) experiences of Catholicism as a norm in the family and eventual realization of its emptiness in practice, (2) experiences of Islam as a norm in the environment and discovery of meaningfulness of Islam (3) experiences of gradual holistic transformation of being a Muslim; and (4) experiences of extension of oneself towards family and society. Secondly, for Muslim converts in prison, exploration begins through (1) experiences of Apathy towards Catholicism and eventual deviation from moral standards, (2) experiences of prison condition as an environment of reflection on spirituality; and (3) experiences of positive effects of being a Muslim inside Prison. Comparisons show that there exists similarities and differences across the two settings in terms of (1) experiences of Catholicism and the degree of its internalization and actualization, (2) experiences of Islamic encounters and the process of conversion; and (3) experience of Islamic devotion and Islamic construct for the self. Theoretical bases of religious conversion found in unique contexts are discussed, initiating a paradigm shift of thinking that is needed to address the deeply rooted prejudices within Catholic and Islamic circles.

Keywords : Catholicism, Islamic conversion, social psychology, religion

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