

Femininity Versus Feminism: Contemporary Islamic Perspectives on the Essence of Womanhood

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Abstract

This essay shows how the concept of womanhood undergoes a transformation in the minds of some western females who convert to the Muslim faith. With respect to the role of women in Islam, three different groups may be distinguished: "outsiders looking in," "insiders looking out," and "converts to Islam looking around and back." Within the first category, a majority see Islam in terms of oppression and servitude, although for a smaller group the faith represents a return to all that "hearth and home" signifies. The second major grouping consists of Muslims, many of whom find Muslim womanhood to be superior to non-Islamic alternatives. But an increasing number seek to liberate females from "the tyranny of Islamic Law." Those in the third category were originally "outsiders looking in," but after a transitional period become "insiders looking out." The female converts are originally attracted to a feminine ideal that is interpreted through their own culture and experience. Becoming "insiders" brings exposure to issues of Islamic womanhood which necessitate a re-interpretation of the essence of femaleness, producing what uninitiated western observers might call rationalizations but which actually form apologetical replies to objections from unbelievers.

The Muslim Female in Mystic Literature

In a highly interesting article entitled "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," Jamal Elias describes the paradoxical position of Muslim women, which becomes evident when comparisons are made between the scriptural precepts of the Muslim faith and the reality of Islamic history. He concludes that female involvement in the religion of Islam has been at two separate levels:

At one level is the human female who, as *muslima*, follows the tenets of her faith and participates in requirements, rituals, and rewards of Islam, albeit in a lesser capacity than does her male counterpart. At another level, the feminine or ideal woman exists in the Muslim imagination, symbolizing virtue and divine compassion, an ideal to which all women should aspire.¹

The first, or essentially mundane, level has been determined by particular interpretations of Qur'anic passages, such as Surah 2:228, "*And they [women] have rights similar to those [of men] over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them,*" and Surah 4:34, "*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more strength than the other, and because they support them from their means.*" Elias demonstrates how some major Sufi thinkers minimized females as human beings in such a way that their role was reduced to that of accessories to males. But he points out that these same writers glorified a type of celestial womanhood by distinguishing between Allah's attributes of majesty (*al-sifat al-jalaliyya*) and his attributes of beauty (*al-sifat al-jamaliyya*). The latter are distinctly feminine, and consequently, according to the Sufis, "since His attributes are an essential aspect of His being, there exists within Allah a feminine nature."² The writings of Ibn al-Arabi are cited as an example; his statement that "the celestial woman is a feature of the divine" would lead to the conclusion that in a mystical sense the female stands above the male. Elias points out that in Muslim literature, Maryam and Fatima both represent a type of perfection never attributed to any male figure. It is even possible to form a syllogism from two hadith – "He who knows Fatima knows himself", and "He who knows himself knows his God" – that results in the conclusion that "He who knows Fatima knows God." Thus "Fatima appears as the perfect expression of the human self", and "through his understanding of the self or essence, the seeker can then understand the divine essence." Thus it is the celestial female rather than the male that points the way to a mystical understanding of Allah.

Elias goes on to say that the result of this dualistic view of womanhood is that:

The male human being appears sandwiched between the physical woman and the ideal woman, the female and the feminine. He is above the female through his superiority, or more accurately, her inferiority or diminished ability in religious matters. Simultaneously he lies below the celestial woman as creative feminine or Sophia.³

In Sufi literature, then, one finds simultaneous support for the seemingly opposing views that physical women are inferior to men, and that the essence of womanhood is superior to maleness.

Elias' article is useful for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that the paradox he has described in an academic fashion is reflected in contemporary social conditions involving the status and role of Muslim women in the real world. It is the purpose of this essay to show how closely academic theorizing actually reflects reality in this area.

The Conversion of Western Females to Islam

The paradox mentioned above becomes immediately apparent when one examines the testimonies of various females regarding their experiences with Islam. Earlier in this century the Christian missionary Samuel Zwemer cited the case of a Persian woman who described her life in this manner:

This is our life; to beat the clothes on the rocks in the river; to mould cakes of manure; to carry heavy loads; to spin, sew, weave, bake, make cheese; bear children; grow old and toothless, and for all this we get only blows and abuse, and live in constant fear of divorce.⁴

An Egyptian woman that Zwemer interviewed was more philosophical, describing the different facets of the typical female's existence in the following manner: "As a babe she is unwelcome; as a child untaught; as a wife unloved; as a mother unhonored; in old age uncared for, and when her miserable dark and dreary life is ended she is unmourned by those whom she has served."⁵

One is tempted, of course, to disregard these comments on account of their source, since Christian missionaries allegedly have a vested interest in representing cultures in a darker manner than a purely objective view might warrant. But even among contemporary Muslims, we find similar sentiments. French immigrant Yasmina Nawal, for instance, has recently

asked: "How can the place of women in Islam be described, other than [to say] that we know that isolation, degradation, housework, multiple pregnancies, disappointments and theft of all their rights is their daily situation in the Arab world?"⁶

But a growing number of western females do not believe – or at least are undeterred by – the stereotypical portrayal of the Muslim female as oppressed by a patriarchal religious system. This is evidenced by the fact that a significant number are converting to the Muslim faith.

Before examining specifics such as who and why, it would be helpful to observe some of the pertinent characteristics of religious conversion in general. When compared to the phenomenon as found in Christianity, for instance, conversion (or reversion, to use Muslim terminology) to Islam deviates markedly from the perspective of the present study, in at least one significant way. This has to do with the relative proportions of men and women who undergo conversion experiences. With regard to Christianity, research during the last century reveals that women are much more likely to convert to the faith than are men. The foundational survey conducted by Edwin Starbuck at the end of the 19th century involved the cases of 192 individuals who had undergone conversion to Christianity in the evangelical sense of the term. 120 of these were females (62.5%), whereas 72 were males (37.5%). Subsequent studies throughout the 20th Century have substantiated that this trend has continued and is still the case today. In contrast, research by this author regarding the conversion of Caucasian-Americans and Western Europeans to the religion of Islam has produced statistics showing proportions that are nearly the opposite of those recorded by Starbuck and others for Christianity. Out of a total of 76 subjects, 23 were females (30%) and 53 were males (70%). While this differentiation may be attributable to the random nature of the survey (the same would be true of Starbuck and his successors), these figures may well indicate that although the Islamic faith does indeed attract females, it does not attract them in the same proportion as does the Christian faith.

The proportional disparity is greater among Western European converts than it is among Americans. This is most likely due to the fact that a large number of European males attribute their conversions to wartime experiences that brought them in close contact with Muslims and Islamic cultures (fully one third of the European male converts mentioned this in accounts of their conversions). European women, on the other hand, remained at home during the world wars and consequently did not experience such contacts.

In contrast we find that in America, the proportions of male and female converts are nearly equal. It appears that the larger number of conversions by females here can be attributed to three factors. First, some American women have reacted negatively to the sociological phenomenon commonly known as the feminist movement with its corresponding effects upon Christianity and Judaism. These women have deliberately sought a religious alternative that advocates a more traditional role for females. We shall have more to say about this in a following section. Second, just as Christianity has traditionally had the reputation of being a religion for women and children, it may be that in America, religion in general has come to be perceived as a female-oriented phenomenon, and, consequently, American women may be expected to adhere in greater proportions to any and all expressions of faith. Third, it may also be that American women are more willing to marry Muslim men (which nearly always involves conversion to Islam even though the official precepts of the religion do not require it of Christians and Jews) than are European women. The available information concerning this third alternative is contradictory. Arif Ghayur, for instance, contends that "among white American [converts] almost 90% are females who married Muslim professionals, especially Asians."⁷ Jan Henningson states that the same is true in Western Europe, where "the largest group among the converts to Islam at the present time is composed of women who have married Muslim immigrants."⁸ Yvonne Haddad, on the other hand, claims that "converts are generally American men who profess their Islam when they marry an Arab-American woman."⁹ And in contrast to both of these claims is the fact that of the 76 subjects included in the present author's study – which include both Western Europeans and Americans – not one mentioned marriage as a factor in their decision to convert. Plainly there is need for further research in this area.

Motivational Factors for Conversion to Islam

It is significant that few of the female converts give reasons for their conversion that are specifically linked to their gender. Of the 23 females in the author's sample, only three mentioned factors that had appealed to them as females. The majority spoke of their attraction to the religion in the same terms that males did, being drawn to its simplicity, its rationality, its emphasis on the universal "brotherhood" of humankind, its "this-worldliness," and its lack of human mediators.¹⁰ This fact shows that while

Islam may be said to appeal more to men than to women, the factors that appeal to women are generally the same as those that appeal to men.

It is also significant that, as noted previously, the proportion of males who convert to Islam appears to be much higher than the proportion who convert to Christianity. While Christian churches have attained the reputation of being institutions for women and children, there exists no such perception with regard to the mosque. This is particularly true in lands where Muslims form a majority of the population and where Muslim women are veiled and secluded, where their attendance at mosque functions is optional or discouraged, and where they are excluded from official positions of leadership. The mosque is indubitably a male institution, and since the stereotypical image of the Muslim male emphasizes his virility and masculinity, his authority and even arrogance, people attracted to these qualities might well opt for Islam over Christianity. One British convert, for instance, noted that he had been raised in Christian surroundings but actually worshiped "nobility and courage." It was due to his observation of these traits in Muslim men that he converted to Islam. While there is little statistical support for the idea, it may be that herein lies a source of appeal not only for western men, but also for western women who desire in a mate a more traditional form of manhood (i.e., emphasizing virility and authority) than that which is perceived to be current in western societies.

On the other hand, it would be reasonable to assume that the standard media presentation of the Muslim female as veiled, secluded, uneducated, and little more than a material possession of the Muslim male finds little to commend itself in the eyes of the contemporary western female – particularly those given to feminist convictions – and although traditional eastern customs of dress and social interaction are not universally enforced in western contexts, the stereotype regarding female subjugation to males has exercised a wide influence, perhaps contributing to the relatively low proportion of female converts. The October 1987 edition of *National Geographic*, for instance, portrayed a fully veiled Muslim female on the cover and contained an article entitled "Women of Saudi Arabia" which described the "oil-rich kingdom of Saudi Arabia" as "a male-dominated culture in which a man's personal and family honor depends on the conduct of females under his care."¹¹ While the author observes that a relatively rapid modernization process is under way in Saudi Arabia, there are still enough indications of continuing restrictions on women to give even highly conservative and traditional western females pause.

But some pause – and then take the plunge, converting to the Muslim faith. These converts generally fall into two categories. The larger group sees beyond the allegations of restricted positions and roles for women and considers the aspects of the religion listed above (i.e., simplicity, rationality, etc.) to be of such primacy that gender restrictions can be overlooked. In ordinary circumstances, members of this group might be opposed to the traditional Muslim view of womanhood, but their search for a religious faith has reached such a stage of intensity that they repress their reservations about what they come to perceive as secondary considerations.

In contrast to the first, a second group does not look beyond but instead finds in what they believe to be the Muslim view of women something to be desired and emulated. There are three factors which this group of female converts consider to have been influential in their decision making. The first is noted by Marcia Hermanson in her research on women in Islam:

The Caucasian-American Muslim of the 1980s is yet another type. One informant described as typical a woman in her 20s who found in Islam the structure she missed in a liberal, *laissez-faire* home where no standards were set and she was told to "be herself." Such a woman is drawn to accept a totally observant Islam consonant with the dress and behavior norms advocated by the current "Islamic movement" and usually perpetuated in America in a milieu informed by Arab immigrants.¹²

Hermanson goes on to say that her interviews with converts have revealed that externals such as the headscarf contribute to "a strong, clearly defined sense of identity." Further, this identity is "buttressed by the reactions around [the converts], even if these are disturbed or hostile."¹³ This observation is similar to that made by Lofland and Stark in their discussion of the role played in religious conversion by "extra-cult-affective bonds," in which the disapproval of a person or persons with whom one has a negative relationship becomes motivation for a deeper involvement with a group that is disapproved of.¹⁴

Second, whereas the convert's own culture might subject her to expressions of disapproval, the Muslim community, on the other hand, is found to be highly supportive, particularly in terms of strong female bonding in personal relationships. Such relationships are experienced by the converts as being more genuine and less competitive than those experienced among non-Muslim females.¹⁵ While this aspect might

function more to keep a new convert within the faith than to draw her in to begin with, contact with friends who have become participants in such a close-knit community could serve to exert a powerful attraction.

Third, the emphasis on family life and responsibilities assumed, within the typical Muslim family, for children and aging parents, is an aspect that many women find appealing. This goes hand in hand with current sociological trends in America in particular, where in the face of rising doubts about the so-called advantages of homes for the elderly and children's day-care centers, people are experimenting with new forms of extended family concepts.

Outsiders, Insiders, and Converts

From the above observations, it is apparent that in discussions of the role of women in Islam we must actually distinguish between three different groups: "outsiders (non-Muslims) looking in;" "insiders (Muslims) looking out;" and "converts to Islam looking around and back."

The first group ("outsiders looking in") may be divided into two subgroups, depending upon the reactions of each to the role of women in Islam as they perceive it. A majority reject the traditional concept of Islamic womanhood in its entirety, although they may evidence curiosity about it and, in some cases, even be intrigued by it. But in their final evaluation they see Islam only in terms of patriarchalism, servitude, oppression (or repression), and insecurity. Using the paradigm of Jamal Elias described at the beginning of this essay, these persons see only the lower level of female participation in Islam, in which the woman "participates in the requirements, rituals, and rewards of Islam, in a lesser capacity than does her male counterpart." Given the current thrust toward gender equality in the West, such a "lesser capacity" is unacceptable, and so conversion to Islam of subjects with such a mindset would be extremely rare or nonexistent.

A second subgroup, however, sees the other, higher level discussed by Elias, the "feminine or ideal woman ... symbolizing virtue and divine compassion, an ideal to which all women should aspire." This group is also intrigued by Muslim womanhood, but in a wholly positive sense. These women find in Islam something which they deem desirable but which they have not experienced in their western environment. For them Islam represents a return to all that the phrase "hearth and home" at one time signified, a concept composed of four characteristics:

1. a lifelong, heterosexual marriage relationship
2. an emphasis upon childbearing and childrearing as both desirable and pleasurable
3. a family hierarchy that is generally – though not exclusively – patriarchal in orientation
4. a commitment to extended family relationships

Convert Wadiyah al-Amin, for instance, remarks that for her,

"... the most influential aspect of Islam ... was its emphasis on family life and role definitions. It had a nice order, something that I lacked most as a person. Since I was left alone to raise my son, a strong family, an active father, and a mother had special significance for me."¹⁶

Beyond such images of domesticity, the members of this subgroup are attracted to what they consider to be precisely defined parameters for the concept of womanhood. Aminah Benjelloun, for instance, claims that

"There is guidance in the Qur'an for every aspect of my public and private life. There is comfort in it in times of trial and distress, and encouragement to be the best I can possibly be as a human being and a woman. Through Islam I discovered my true value, my value as a woman ... I discovered that being a woman is something very special and I was glad I was a woman."¹⁷

The second major grouping of females, which we are calling "insiders looking out," consists of women who have been born and raised as Muslims. These may also be divided into two subgroups. A large number – most likely still a majority, although there is debate concerning this – find Muslim womanhood to be superior to non-Islamic alternatives. They would see themselves as the personification of Elias' "ideal woman," or believe themselves at least to have the potential for attaining such a personification. While some object to the non-Qur'anic restrictions for women imposed through the centuries by Muslim regimes for political purposes, all in all they are supportive of the Islamic view of womanhood and are highly critical of western feminism in particular. Anisa Abd El Fattah of the National Association of Muslim Women writes in the *Islamic Society of North America's Islamic Horizons* that,

It is unIslamic for Muslim women to align themselves or associate themselves in spirit or deed with the enemies of Islam, and feminism by its very definition is in opposition to Islam. In its past and present

behaviors, it has openly demonstrated its rejection of the criterion of Allah ... Feminism and feminist doctrine, methodology and philosophies have no place in Islam ... The doctrine of feminism poses a very real threat to the young and growing Muslim community in North America. It is a threat because its call has great appeal to thousands of Muslim women that have grown impatient in the face of *bidah* that has found its way into our religion and that has manifested itself as an oppressive and sometimes violent force ... Today as a result of feminism we find a society that suffers from homosexuality, juvenile crime, violence, and spousal abuse. Illegitimate births and poverty among women and children are at an all-time high and not even the feminists have a clue as to how to stop them.¹⁸

Not all *muslimas* view the feminist movement so negatively, however. There are an increasing number who see their role as one of liberating Muslim women from "the tyranny of Islamic Law." "Participating in Islam in a lesser capacity than males" is just as unacceptable for these "insiders looking out" as it would be for the majority of "outsiders looking in." And the more radical Muslim feminists go beyond rhetoric that speaks of *bidah* and alternative "interpretations" of Muslim traditions; they do not hesitate to attack even the most fundamental documents of the faith. Yasmina Nawal, for instance, admits that "The Qur'an, *Fiqh*, and the *Hadith* are unchangeable and eternal." But these are not positive attributes in her view, for,

"... from this traditional and suprahistorical character come an assortment of stereotypical patterns that in a very subtle way influence the organization of society and restrict the lives of women with terrible prohibitions and taboos that destroy any possibility of progress."¹⁹

Another example is the claim that it was a quote in an Indian newspaper charging Taslima Nasrin with "calling for changes in the Qur'an" that brought to a boil the controversy surrounding her literary works. And Nasrin's protest that she was misunderstood and was actually criticizing the *Shari'a* rather than the Qur'an itself only served to inflame further the fundamentalists who sought her execution as an apostate.

Perhaps the most interesting major grouping, however, is the third; those whom we are calling "converts looking around and back." Many of these are confronted by a paradoxical situation we have hinted at in

our discussion of the previous two groups. Converts, of course, were originally "outsiders looking in," and they obviously found certain aspects of Islam to be attractive, otherwise they would not have converted. At the very least we can assume that they found nothing sufficiently disagreeable about the status and role of Muslim women to prevent their entry into the faith.

Once they have taken the necessary steps to become Muslims, however, their status changes. They become, after a transitional period, "insiders looking out." As such they find themselves confronted with the choice of adhering either to the subgroup favoring the traditional Islamic view of women or to the change-oriented subgroup. Indeed, Anisa Abd El Fattah speaks of her concern regarding the latter when she warns that feminists

... now have access into our communities through converts that still have an attraction to feminist ideology and methodology, Muslim women who see feminism as a mechanism to force needed change in the contemporary practice and interpretation of Islam.²⁰

At present this appears to be an unwarranted fear, for there is no empirical evidence that feminists find Islam in any way attractive, thus precluding conversions from this source. Nor does it seem likely that most Muslim men would seek to marry women with a radically feminist bent, so it is doubtful that feminists would be able to enter the Muslim community via matrimony. Of course it is always possible that former feminists who grew disillusioned with the rhetoric and behavior of feminism and sought its ideological opposite in Islam may eventually grow weary of Muslim life and revert to their previous convictions. But there is currently no evidence that this is occurring and, indeed, it appears that the reverse may actually be happening. Marcia Hermanson, for instance, speaks of:

"... the case of some American-born women with very secularized Muslim immigrant spouses who, through the participation of their teenage children in Muslim camps and youth groups, had begun to more strongly represent their Muslim identity through behavior modification."²¹

This observation indicates that at least some converts become increasingly confirmed in their new faith rather than becoming disillusioned.

It is noteworthy that for those converts who are attracted to the traditional role of women in Islam, there are really only two viable

defenses against the rhetoric of the feminist critique of the religion. One is simply to deny that any truly significant problems exist in connection with women in Islam, which would in essence place the blame for expressions of discontent upon dissatisfied persons rather than an unsatisfactory system. While this is not an entirely adequate solution to the problem, it at least serves to change the focus of the controversy from a structure held to be divinely revealed by Allah to fallible human beings who can easily misinterpret Allah's perfect ways. The second alternative is to reject the feminist agenda as too extreme and work instead to produce micro-changes, seeking to transform contemporary Muslim praxis slowly and incrementally by means of a dialogical reinterpretation of Qur'anic passages and hadith relating to women. Given the ideological environment of today's world, it would be logical to assume that this second option would be the more popular of the two. What is interesting to observe, however, is the fact that female converts to the Muslim faith appear to favor the first of these two alternatives rather than the second.

What often happens is that converts who are confronted with either "insider" or "outsider" criticism of the religion voluntarily choose to adopt intricately devised rationalizations to bolster their own commitment (as well as, perhaps, their consciences) and defend themselves against the rhetoric of both Muslim and non-Muslim feminists. The writings of two of the more famous converts to Islam, one female and one male, may be used as illustrations of this phenomenon.

Maryam Jameelah, nee Margaret Marcus, was born into a Jewish home in New York City and converted to Islam at the age of 26. In the account of her conversion experience she states that she was attracted by "the high moral standards" of Islam, which on the strength of her numerous writings we could assume included standards regarding marriage and the family. But whereas we noted previously that many western women who convert to Islam do so because they are seeking permanence, security, and commitment with regard to family life and the marriage relationship, Jameelah – herself now a member of a polygamous family in Pakistan – commends the fact that marriage in Islam is quite easily dissolved. She believes that:

"In Islam marriage is a contract which aims to legitimize [sic] sexual relations and create the foundation of a healthy family atmosphere for the rearing of children ... The teachings of Islam, in forbidding sexual relations outside of marriage, put this prohibition

into practical effect by making marriage, divorce, and remarriage as easy as possible so that there can be no excuse for illicit relations."²²

The British convert Marmaduke Pickthall famed for his English translation of the Qur'an – goes even further than Jameelah when he speaks of his view that:

In marriage there is no merging of personalities. Each remains distinct and independent. They have simply entered into an engagement for the performance of certain duties toward each other, an engagement which can be hallowed and made permanent by mutual regard and love. [But] if that regard and love be not forthcoming, the engagement had best be terminated by divorce.²³

Such views, should they become widespread, are unlikely to improve the general image of Islam in the West. While these perceptions of marriage and family life might indeed serve to disarm the criticisms of feminists who claim that Islam robs women of any sense of individual identity, they certainly do nothing for females who are looking for secure marriages and more traditional approaches to family relationships – the very group from which a large number of converts are drawn.

Even polygamy – a concept that usually arouses a storm of criticism in the monogamous West – is transformed by converts into a logical and justifiable institution. Mavis Jolly, for instance, wrote that:

I talked of it to [one of] my Muslim friends. He illustrated with the aid of newspaper articles how much true monogamy there was in England, and convinced me that a limited polygamy was the answer to the secret unions that are becoming so distressingly common in the West ... My own common sense could see that, particularly after a war, when women of a certain age group far outnumber men, a percentage of them are destined to remain spinsters ... In Islam, no one is forced into a polygamous marriage, but in a perfect religion, the opportunity must be there to meet those cases where it is necessary.²⁴

Again we find that Pickthall was even more extreme in his criticism of monogamy and praise of polygamy; for him adherence to a strict policy of monogamy was tantamount to

... being degraded (because of being barred from marriage) to a depth which every good Muslim surveys with horror while a larger number

are debarred from all fulfillment of their natural functions which the Muslim regards as a great wrong ... For the sake of the fetish of monogamy, a countless multitude of women and their children have been sacrificed and made to suffer cruelly.²⁵

Conclusion

We may conclude, then, that the concept of womanhood appears to undergo a transformation in the minds of some western females who convert to the Muslim faith. They are attracted in the beginning to a feminine ideal that is interpreted through their own culture and experience, and they choose Islam in reaction to the degradation and even erasure of femaleness that they associate with the feminist movement. Ideals concerning extended family relationships, a truly "masculine" husband, and a life oriented around children together form the parameters of a concise identity as a woman. Becoming then an "insider" brings exposure to issues of Islamic womanhood which may have previously been acknowledged intellectually but for which life as a woman in the West provided no first-hand experience. Such exposure eventually necessitates a reinterpretation of the essence of femaleness, producing what uninitiated western observers might call rationalizations but which from the standpoint of converts – as well as other Muslims – are nothing more than fundamental apologetical replies to objections from unbelievers.

As long as radical feminism remains an aberration in the context of Islam as a whole, the "traditionalist" thinking of the converts will receive support and affirmation from the Muslim community. Should the nascent Muslim women's movement ever attain a significant momentum, however, it will be interesting to observe whether converts will be driven to act even more extremely to protect their personal image of their adopted faith, and so be counted among the staunchest defenders of traditional Islamic womanhood, or if such a barrage of feminist rhetoric will unlock repressed feelings of discontent and guilt at having forsaken the characteristics of femaleness consistent with the culture in which they were given birth, and so precipitate a movement back toward an ideology previously foresaken.

Notes

1. Jamal J. Elias, "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," *The Muslim World* (July-October 1988): 209.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
4. Samuel M. Zwemer, *Moslem Women* (West Medford, MA: Central Committee of the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1926), p. 31.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
6. Yasmina Nawal, *Kvinnan under Islam* (Bokforlaget Roda Rummet, 1982), p. 7.
7. Arif Ghayur, "Ethnic Distribution of American Muslims and Selected Socio-Economic Characteristics," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* (January 1984): 47.
8. Jan Henningson, "Att Utbreda Guds Rike - Ett Uppdrag for Bade Kristna och Muslimer?" *Svensk Missionstidskrift* 3 (1983): 3.
9. Yvonne Haddad, "Arab Muslims and Islamic Institutions in America: Adaptation and Reform," in *Arabs in the New World*, edited by Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983): 79.
10. See the author's *Islamic Da'wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), chapter 10, for more details regarding these factors.
11. Arianne Alireza, "Women of Saudi Arabia," *National Geographic* (October 1987): 423.
12. Marcia K. Hermanson, "Two-Way Acculturation: Muslim Women in America Between Individual Choice (Liminality) and Community Affiliation (Communitas)," in *The Muslims of America*, ed. by Yvonne Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 193.
13. *Ibid.*
14. See John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* (December 1965): 862ff.
15. Hermanson, p. 193-194.
16. Wadiyah al-Amin, "Islam Gave Me a Sense of Dignity," *Islamic Horizons* (September 1979): 8-9.
17. Aminah Benjelloun. "Why I Am a Muslim," *Islamic Horizons* (September 1984): 6.

18. Anisa Abd El Fattah, "Feminism in Islam," *Islamic Horizons* (April 1994): 12-13.
19. Nawal, *Kvinnan under Islam*, p. 8.
20. El Fattah, "Feminism in Islam," p. 10.
21. Hermanson, "Two-Way Acculturation," pp. 191-192.
22. Maryam Jameelah, *Islam versus Ahl al-Kitab: Past and Present* (Lahore, Pakistan: Mohammed Yusuf Khan and Sons, 1978), p. 306.
23. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *Islamic Culture* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ferozsons, 1927), pp. 137-145. Cited by Jameelah in *Islam Versus Ahl al-Kitab*, p. 308.
24. Mavis B. Jolly, "Why I Accepted Islam," *Muslim News International* (November 1968): 38-39.
25. Pickthall, *Islamic Culture*, cited by Jameelah in *Islam Versus Ahl al-Kitab.*, p. 307.