

Muslim convert quits Catholic Church, says it's too weak against Islam

by [Alessandro Speciale](#)

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) A high-profile Italian Muslim who converted to Catholicism and was baptized by Pope Benedict XVI announced on Monday (March 25) that he will leave the church to protest its soft stance against Islam.

Egyptian-born Magdi Cristiano Allam, 61, a prominent journalist and outspoken critic of Islam, publicly entered the Catholic Church on March 22, 2008 during an Easter Vigil service, receiving baptism directly from Benedict.

After his conversion, Allam founded a small right-wing political party that lost badly in Italy's general elections last April.

Writing on Monday in the right-wing daily *Il Giornale*, Allam explained that he considers his conversion to Catholicism finished "in combination with the end of (Benedict's) pontificate."

"The 'papolatry' that has inflamed the euphoria for Francis I and has quickly archived Benedict XVI was the last straw in an overall framework of uncertainty and doubts about the Church," he wrote.

On Friday, Francis pledged to "intensify dialogue among the various religions," particularly Islam.

Allam, who has called Islam an "intrinsically violent ideology," said his main reason for leaving the church was its perceived "religious relativism, in particular the legitimization of Islam as a true religion."

"Europe will end up being subjugated to Islam," he warned in *Il Giornale*, unless it "finds the courage to denounce Islam as incompatible with our civilization and fundamental human rights," and to "banish the Quran for inciting hatred, violence and death towards non-Muslims." Europeans also need to "condemn Sharia as a crime against humanity" and to "stop the spread of mosques."

Allam said he would remain a Christian but that he didn't "believe in the church anymore."

Allam's surprise conversion was orchestrated by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, currently head of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, who "personally accompanied" the Muslim intellectual's approach to the Catholic faith.

At the time, the Vatican's chief spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, stressed that the conversion was the result of Allam's "personal journey" and was not intended as a direct message to Muslims.

A leading Muslim intellectual involved in interfaith dialogue with the Vatican, Aref Ali Nayed, criticized the public conversion ceremony as a "triumphalist way to score points," and said it raised "serious doubts" about the Catholic Church's policy toward Islam.