

RACHID EL MAGHREBI -
A CONTROVERSIAL & INFLUENTIAL
AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST

by John Andrews

Since leaving the US in 1983, John has ministered in the Arab world in various capacities, but has a special place in his heart for Morocco. He is currently involved in a media ministry in southern Europe.

Rachid el Maghrebi (lit 'the Moroccan'), has become a household figure in Morocco and throughout the Islamic world. This has not gone unnoticed in the Arab press. For example, 'Nichane', a Moroccan weekly, recently gave an unusually positive report, detailing his testimony and media ministry:

Clean-shaven, with the glimmer of a smile on his face, and wearing a carefully-tied necktie, that matches his suit, Brother Rachid looks out at his viewers on the weekly programme 'Su'al Jari' (A daring question). This programme, which is broadcast by the Hayat Channel, has made Rachid a TV star who invites Moroccans in particular to embrace the religion of the Prophet Issa...'

I first got to know Rachid when he was a new believer in his late teens in Casablanca. I remember him as a sharp guy with leadership potential, but I could never have imagined that he would become such an influential and controversial ambassador for Christ to his people. Who is this young man who is shaking the foundations of Islam across the Arab world? Here is a brief sketch.

Beginnings

Born in 1973 in El Jadida, Rachid is the son of a Muslim imam, who raised his son to follow in his footsteps. Rachid had memorized one-sixth of the Qur'an by age six, chanting it according to Islamic practice. He diligently performed the rites of Islam – prayer, fasting and alms giving.

In 1985, he just happened to stumble upon an evangelistic radio broadcast in Arabic. He wrote a very Islamic reply, which did not get a response to his questions, but he did receive a short booklet. That began several years of study and correspondence comparing Islam and Christianity. This, in turn, led him to give his life to Christ at the end of 1989.

Nichane gives some interesting details of how this affected his life and family:

'I did not want to make public my new faith. I turned in on myself and continued to perform the prayers in the mosque as before,' Rachid admits. His family suspected something, after

noticing the change that had come over his life, especially since they knew about his correspondence with Christian groups, through the letters that came to the family house.

The family's doubts pushed them to hold a meeting in Rachid's presence, to ask him directly whether he had changed his religion and embraced Christianity. 'They asked me directly, "Have you become a Christian?"' recounts Rachid. He tried dodging the question and changing the subject, but somebody asked him to recite the Shahada. 'Of course, I refused, because anybody who embraces the religion of Jesus cannot recite the Shahada,' says Rachid. This refusal made the members of his family scream at him and some of them wept and cursed them. 'In short, everyone expressed his sorrow in his own way.'

They asked me directly, "Have you become a Christian?"' recounts Rachid. He tried dodging the question and changing the subject, but somebody asked him to recite the Shahada. 'Of course, I refused, because anybody who embraces the religion of Jesus cannot recite the Shahada.'

Secret Believer

For 15 years, Rachid lived as a secret believer in Morocco. He attended Hassan II University in Casablanca, where he studied economics and computer science. He also studied journalism and received training in Bible translation with the Bible Society. For six years, he was the main coordinator of a project that has now almost finished translating the Bible into the Moroccan dialect of Arabic. He later managed a computer company.

For many years he was estranged from his family. He relates that once he entered into discussion with his father, who still worked as an imam in a mosque. 'I confronted my father with many facts about Islam, and he asked me, "How did you know that?" And I answered him, 'By reading the books in your library, like Ibn Kathir's commentary, and some stories from the biography of the Prophet Mohamed. As far as I was concerned, his answers were unconvincing and he preferred not to reply to some of my questions,' he added.

In the late 90s, he got married to a second-generation Moroccan believer, which was not accepted very well by his family. Later he made an effort to reach out and repair his relationship with them. The Nichane magazine describes the change that resulted: 'He agreed with his brothers and his parents that they would not discuss his beliefs or his personal faith. He adds that the relationships became very good, especially after his mother intervened to restore his relationship with his father.'

A new ministry

In 2005, he left Morocco after being harassed by the security services. He was looking for some peace and stability for his young family. A friend helped him get into a program for further computer training, totally unaware that a different calling was awaiting him.

Within the year, a fellow BMB involved in a new satellite TV ministry called him and suggested that he might make a good TV presenter. Rachid was hesitant but was willing to give it a try. The rest is history.

Since then, he has hosted several television shows that compare Christianity and Islam, including 55 taped episodes of *Unveiling the Mask* and close to 200 live episodes of *Daring Questions*. Rachid's deep knowledge of both faiths gives him boldness to challenge false beliefs with wisdom, love and respect.

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Daring Questions is a 90-minute weekly show that features dynamic testimonies of Muslim-background believers and gives followers of Islam the opportunity to ask questions about the Christian message through live on-air phone calls. Thousands of viewers have called the program's live prayer line or visited its websites – many to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Translating the Qur'an

Rachid is also passionate about the need for people not only to read the Bible in a language they can understand but also read the Qur'an in a language they can understand. He is convinced that the more Muslims know what the Qur'an says, the more their eyes will be opened and they will question it.

While still in Morocco, Rachid began a project to translate the Qur'an into the local Arabic dialect. He now has 27 Suras completed, continuing the project as he gets time. It was out of this work that he came to write his first book, *Miracles of the Qur'an: study and analysis*, which is reviewed in the following article.

N.B. Quotes taken from an English translation of the article: 'Brother Rachid', a Controversial Evangelist' by Sami al-Muwaddani, Nichane magazine, no 247, April 9-15, 2010.