



Understanding Muslim Dilemmas in North America

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ONE OF THE MOST COMMON PHRASES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS “THE UNfinished task.” When it comes to understanding Muslims and Muslim dilemmas we cannot speak of the unfinished task. It is more appropriate to use the phrase “the awaiting task.” The same, of course, applies to the task of conveying to Muslim hearts the Christian understanding of God and life. These are immense undertakings barely begun. There are good reasons for giving these tasks some priority now. For North American Christians a practical reason is the unaccustomed proximity with Muslims. We must recognize that a new dimension has entered our lives, a new demand is placed on our spirits, and a new call to understanding—in Bishop Kenneth Cragg’s well-known phrase—has been sounded.

The task of understanding Muslim dilemmas in North America has to be

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Muslims, more than ever before, represent a living presence in North America, and in a non-Muslim context they experience certain dilemmas. This essay, first delivered as a special lecture at Culver-Stockton College, November 6, 1995, introduces Islam and Muslims and describes both the immigrant and African American streams in North America.

placed in the wider contexts of understanding Islam itself and of understanding Christian-Muslim relationships. Those horizons lie beyond the scope of our concern in this presentation. We will limit ourselves to providing some information and making some observations that may be useful to the understanding of Muslims in North America, in particular their dilemmas, well aware that here we can only begin to get into such a large and important topic.

Three elements in dealing with another religious community are awareness, understanding, and healthy interaction. Awareness is far from automatic, as we well know, but it seems attainable. It simply means that we have to wake up, or we need someone to wake us up—hey! there’s something important going on; Islam is going to be the second largest religion on the continent! At the other end of the spectrum, healthy interaction also seems relatively uncomplicated though obviously challenging—Christians and Muslims must be involved with each other in positive ways. What lies in the middle, namely, the creation of understanding, is far more daunting.

A notable scholar in the field of religious studies, Joachim Wach, stated that the goal of the discipline is *Verstehen*, understanding. The Christian concern for Muslims includes that goal and more. The literal meaning of the term “understanding” suggests the intensity of the effort that is required. It means what it says—to stand under, to draw so close to the other that one as it were stands under him or her, and from that position of intimacy grasps reality and shares reality. Very simply put, an appreciation of Muslim dilemmas requires the understanding of Muslim people that becomes available only through the position of nearness. Christians are by definition, or should be, experts in nearness.

I. MUSLIMS IN NORTH AMERICA: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

The fact of the existence of Muslims in North America has been underlined most recently by the Million Man march on Washington, neutral in intent, but with Islamic undertones. Two comments may be made. The task we face is first of all the delicate one of turning undertones into clear notes; that is, we must lift up the inter-faith and interreligious issues to the level where they may be addressed. That means we must modify our classical approach in such a way as to allow for some discussion of interreligious understanding within the public domain as a necessary preliminary to dealing with social problems associated with inter-religion. Let us turn undertones into clear notes in such a way that both understanding and healthy interaction can be created.

The second comment has to do with the potential of the Million Man march for the aggravation of caricatures. As almost everyone now knows, Muslims are tired of caricatures. The problem of the march was that it gave the impression that Louis Farrakhan and his relatively small Nation of Islam group fairly represent North American Muslims as a whole, or even African American Muslims. The writer recently occupied a platform with a Muslim professor who in response to a question from the audience emphatically denied that Farrakhan has anything to do with Islam properly understood; he in no way represents the great body of North

American Muslims. The strong statement that he made would be reiterated by many Muslims, while there would be others more moderate in their appraisals.

This brings us to the realization that to understand Muslims in North America requires agility of mind and spaciousness of spirit. By agility of mind we refer to the capacity and need to make clear distinctions. There are many different kinds of Muslims. By spaciousness of spirit we mean that one has to use deep empathy in at least two directions – the first involves sensing the pain that Muslims feel under the pressure of constant stereotyping, and the second involves self-criticism in regard to the racism that is deeply involved in the development of attitudes toward American Islam. However, agility of mind and spaciousness of spirit are the products of education, and educating Christians about their Muslim neighbors is a basic challenge that we can and must accept.

North American Muslims fall into two major streams—the first is the immigrant-descended stream and the second is the African American stream. They join together to make up the river of North American Islam that comprises about 4.9 million people, a median estimate. Roughly two-thirds are immigrant-descended Muslims and one-third are African American Muslims. The apparent simplicity of the idea of two major streams needs immediate correction. Within the immigrant Muslim stream there are rivulets of cultural differentiation, Muslims having come to the United States and Canada from many different countries and cultures. Except for their Islam they are essentially unrelated to each other. In the same way, in the African American stream there are a dozen or more sub-groups. The two-stream picture is useful to draw out major contrasts and to highlight dilemmas, but it is not quite true to the actual situation. In addition, we cannot neglect the white North American converts to Islam, sectarian groups, and the large visiting Muslim community that includes students and teachers.

What is happening in the United States and Canada is that Muslims from many different backgrounds are being thrown together in a way that is not the case anywhere else in the world, except for the unique pilgrimage event at Mecca. Not only do Muslims face the problem of dealing with the North American melting-pot, therefore, but they face the challenge of integration with each other. How they deal with that challenge may make North American Muslims significant for the wider Muslim world in a way that goes far beyond the weight of their numbers, and it will make them important for all societies that seek integrating models.

II. THE FAITH CONTEXT OF NORTH AMERICAN MUSLIMS

Muslims in North America are held together by their Islam and by their common desire to live as Muslims as well as Americans and Canadians. At the risk of repeating what is generally known, let me draw attention to some of the basic features of Islam. It represents the second largest religion in the world, with 1,122,000,000 adherents, according to our estimate, comprising one-fifth of the human race (19.3%). The terms Islam and Muslim reveal the core of the religious faith. Islam is the noun, equivalent to Christianity, and Muslim is the adjective, equivalent to Christian. Both words stem from a root that signifies surrender, with

a secondary meaning of peace. Islam therefore means “the surrendering that produces peace” and Muslim means “one who submits to God and thereby obtains peace.” The term for God is Allāh, a generic word that literally means “the God” or “the Almighty.” A Muslim is to surrender to God who is One, Almighty, and Sovereign. As sovereign Lord he is the Creator, Ruler, and Judge of the world and humanity.

The world and humanity belong to God, but humanity has a problem. The problem is related to the created nature of a human being. Every human has within one’s being the potential for both good and evil, and human beings are called upon to commend the good and prohibit the evil. The problem is that the struggle is a difficult one, for humans are “prone to evil” as the Muslim scripture puts it. Being prone to evil, human beings are inconsistent in their behavior. Their surrendering to God is inadequate, and they are in danger of judgment and punishment. Humanity needs help. At this point a key Islamic theological principle comes into play, and that is the merciful guidance of God. God is merciful. At the head of every chapter of the Qurʾān except one are the words “in the Name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate.” God’s mercy is given to humanity through guidance, that is, through the revelation of his will. He lets people know how they should behave.

The guidance of God comes to humanity through prophets and books. God repeatedly raises up prophets; in fact, a prophet for every human society. The Qurʾān presents twenty-eight prophets. Of them, twenty-one are biblical persons, from Adam to Jesus. God sends a prophet and then human beings are good for a while, but very quickly they mess it up and God has to send another prophet. This oscillation of human behavior and the repeated renewal of God’s guidance finally has its end. The end comes when God, as it were, becomes weary of the process and decides to send one last prophet and one last message. The prophet is Muhammad (570-632) and the message is the Qurʾān. The message of the Qurʾān is the complete confirmation, encapsulation, and crystallization of all the previous revelations and it clearly puts before human beings the intention of God. In the Muslim view it is the very word of God, the miraculous link between heaven and earth, and the most precious possession of Muslims. Muhammad in turn is the last and final prophet, who is the authentic model for human behavior. Muslims love him dearly.

Human behavior is the primary issue for Muslims. Faith must now be turned into the implementation of God’s will on earth. Obedience and piety are crucial. The relation between God and the believer is that of Master and servant. God who is the moral legislator of the universe gives his commands to his people. They are to happily accept their role as his obedient servants and should aspire to nothing greater. The glory of humanity is the service of God. The terms guidance, surrender, and servanthood sum up Islamic religion (*dīn*).

According to true *dīn* all of life is to be structured and ordered according to God’s will. This is the most difficult of Muslim concepts to translate into the realities of North American life with its bifurcation of sacred and secular, religion

and state. God in the Muslim view is the Lord of the Worlds, and the “worlds” include the realms of social, economic, and political life, as well as cultic and ritual expressions. The guidance of God, revealed in the Qur’ān, becomes the law of God, expressed in the *sharī‘a*. This term means “clear path” and refers to the all-embracing code of life in Islam. Next to Allāh, Muhammad, and Qur’ān, the term *sharī‘a* is the most important word in Islam. Law and behavior are crucial. Islam is a religion of law, and the law is the gospel.

Islam is therefore orthopraxis, not orthodoxy. Muslims are not very much concerned with how one thinks about theological questions – within reason – but rather how one behaves or strives to behave in this world in conformity to God’s will. Muslims love order and structure in life, and the rhythm of decent behavior. They are to struggle against the evil of their own souls and the evils in society and to bring both individual and social life into a proper relationship with God’s will.

This order and structure in life is expressed through the Muslim community. The Muslim community is sacred. It is the family, the *umma* of God. The family of God governed by the law of God is the ideal for Muslim society. Within that community Muslims observe five basic beliefs and five basic practices that give coherence to the community. The five basic beliefs are straightforward: God, angels, prophets, books, and Day of Judgment. Some Muslims still add predestination as a sixth belief.

The five basic practices are also straightforward. The first is the confession – “There is no god but Allāh, and Muhammad is his messenger” – the declaration of which makes one a Muslim. Then there is prayer, the throbbing and beating heart of Muslim piety. Five times a day the forehead touches the ground with the phrase “Glory be to God.” The third requirement is fasting. In the month of Ramadān no food or water crosses Muslim lips in the daylight hours as they concentrate their minds on God. Fourthly, there is the *zakat* or alms-giving – 2 ½ percent of one’s discretionary income is to be given to the poor, and finally there is the pilgrimage. Annually two million Muslim believers make their way to Mecca where historic Islam began, and every Muslim man and woman desires to be part of that massive throng. As they circle around the Ka’ba, they are reminded that God is the center of life, and that all our thoughts and activities should circle around God. Some Muslims add as a sixth precept the spiritual struggle for the faith (*jihād*). This, in brief, is the basic and universal Islamic faith that Muslims are attempting to live out in North America.

The primary requirements of their faith and practice do not create insurmountable dilemmas for Muslims in North America. Muslims can be Muslims on this continent just as they can be anywhere in the world. Muslims do have some specific problems, however, that arise out of the total context. To appreciate what those dilemmas are, we must turn to the history of Islam in North America. Against that background we may speak of seven dilemmas: the retention of Islamic faith; the integration and unity of Muslim believers into a community of faith; the problem of religious nominalism and secularization; the provision and training of acceptable religious leaders; the coordination of various organizations and activi-

ties; the fulfillment of certain requirements of Muslim law; and the racial emphases of black Muslims.

III. MUSLIMS IN NORTH AMERICA: THE IMMIGRANT STREAM

We will deal first with the immigrant Muslim stream. Muslims will tell you that Islam came to this continent with Christopher Columbus, since Spanish Muslim sailors were aboard his ship. But for all practical purposes the first Muslims in the United States were slaves from Muslim societies in West Africa, and it is clear that a significant percentage of the slaves had to be Muslim. Their Islam disappeared, however, as the slaves were gradually Christianized. This brings us to the real beginning of Islam that dates to the late 1800s, when Muslims were part of the first great immigrant wave into America.

After about 1875, Muslim immigrants from Middle Eastern countries came as laborers, factory workers, small businessmen, and itinerant salespeople. They were generally poor and uneducated, and were not well-versed in Islam. They quickly became assimilated into the American melting-pot, many becoming Christians. This points to *the first and foundational dilemma* of North American Muslims, and that is how to retain their faith in a Christian-majority land. After 1918 the number of immigrants increased, and they began to go to smaller towns as well as cities. Thus the first American mosque, later dismantled, was built in tiny Ross, North Dakota. An Islamic Center, the first of its kind, was established in Michigan City, Indiana in 1914. The first continuing mosque in America started in a rented hall in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1920, and a traditional mosque was constructed there in 1934.

This past summer I went to see this historic building. It is a simple blue-domed building set back from First Avenue in a residential area, and it conveys a sense of belonging. The building was refurbished in 1971 and in 1980 and is now being extended. The 1980 improvement was the addition of a minaret from which the call to prayer is issued. The inscription says: "This minaret was achieved with the universal support of our Muslim brothers in Cairo, Jeddah, and Tripoli." The inscription reminds us that in earlier years Muslims in the United States had little contact with Muslims in other countries. This situation has now changed considerably and, since the oil boom, funding for the construction of mosques and other activities has been generously given by Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia. The addition of the minaret signifies a new emotional confidence. "We can be ourselves," it says. "We can make a little noise, and we can publicly issue the call to prayer." In the interior of the mosque the times of prayer are posted. During the month of August the times of prayer were 5:10 A.M., 1:30 P.M., 5:15 P.M., 8:00 P.M., and 9:30 P.M. The congregational prayer (*khutba*) was on Fridays, 1:30-2:00, and on Sundays there was a lecture from 12:00-1:00. The latter arrangement is an adaptation to American culture. In Cedar Rapids, Muslims have been quietly conducting their faith and life as American citizens for the last seventy-five years.

The major immigration influx of Muslims, however, was to the big cities, especially New York, Detroit, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and

Washington. More than 20 percent of the people of Dearborn, Michigan are Middle Eastern Muslims who established a major settlement with many mosques. Today the large American and Canadian cities are the chief centers of North American Islam.

After the Second World War the immigration process changed. One change was from poorer people to professional classes. Some of the professionals came to escape persecution, and this, for example, brought on the wave of Iranian immigrants to California after the deposition of the Shah. But there was another change, a geographic one, namely from the Middle East to South Asia and Africa. From South Asia—India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—came engineers, doctors, and educators in search of employment, and they now constitute a major force in North American Islam. One of their esteemed representatives was Dr. Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) of the University of Chicago, the leading Muslim scholar committed to the western academic tradition, whose books represent the highest in Muslim scholarship. Finally, Muslims also started coming from Africa, many of them refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia. They joined the refugees from Kurdistan and Afghanistan to represent a major new force in North American Islam. Thus Islam in the United States began to take on a kaleidoscopic appearance, representing the diversity of the Muslim world both culturally and socially. *The second Muslim dilemma* now appears—the problem of how to blend all these strands into a united community of faith.

The post-World War II wave of Muslim immigrants was much more Islamically connected than earlier immigrations. They have built many mosques and Islamic centers, as well as other institutions, to maintain their faith and to avoid the assimilation that occurred with the earlier immigrants. It was not that they did not want to be American, but they wanted to be Muslim American. The construction of the great Islamic Center in Washington (1949-1957), cosponsored by fourteen Muslim countries, was an important symbolic event. But the more that Muslims tried to be truly Islamic in Christian America, the more new dilemmas emerged, for now they had to live lives that were supposed to be controlled by Islamic law in a context not geared to its demands.

The profile of immigrant Islam that emerges from this process is a fascinating one. Not only is there a cultural mix, but there is also a considerable diversity in practice. Some American Muslims are very nominal in their Islamic devotion. It is interesting that one of the complaints that some African American Muslims make about the older Muslims is on this count. They claim to be more faithful in Muslim practice than traditional Muslims from other lands. Immigrant-descended Muslims are naturally not pleased with such comments from the late-coming and often borderline-heretical African American Muslims. It has been suggested that up to 90 percent of immigrant Muslims are not associated with organized religious institutions, the implication being that they are not practicing Muslims. This is a dubious statistic, for mosque attendance and membership has never been a criterion for “Islamicity,” and all across the Muslim world the number of Muslims attending mosques is far less than the number of actually practicing Muslims.

Moreover, in the United States there are insufficient mosques to attend, and constraints of employment often make attendance difficult. Until we get better information, we must be content with saying that some Muslims are faithful *muminīn*, that is, really involved believers, and some are nominal in their performance. This reality represents a *third Muslim dilemma*.

The practicing immigrant Muslims have developed a relatively high profile of activities. The overall number of Muslim institutions, including all streams, is not perfectly tabulated. In one Muslim directory¹ there are listed at least 1,220 mosques and cultural centers, councils and institutes, societies and organizations, student and youth associations, information and service agencies, refugee and relief committees, foundations and business centers. Another source² suggests that there are as many as 2,300 institutions, including 1,300 mosques and Islamic centers. There is everything from the Coordinating Council of Muslims Organization to the Islamic Senior Citizens Club, from the Mosque of Allah to the Timbucktoo Institute of Science and Technology. In addition there are many full-time and part-time elementary and other religious education schools.

The major missing item in the list of Muslim institutions is even a single Sunnī theological education establishment. Apart from one Shī'a school in Medina, New York, there is no contextual education for American-based Muslim clergy, and *‘ulamā'* (scholars) and *īmāms* (prayer leaders) who are well-trained in the classical Islamic tradition have to be imported. This constitutes another dilemma for North American Muslims. The lack of knowledgeable religious leadership that is really aware of the American scene and can help Muslims to apply their faith relevantly to their unique context creates a major problem for the future, increases the possibility for clergy-lay bifurcation, and strengthens the hand of simplistic religion. The closest to a successful attempt to meet that need was led by Ismail al-Faruqi (1921-1986), a well-known Palestinian-American scholar-activist who practically became the voice of revivalist American immigrant Islam. He called for the Islamicization of modern knowledge, and his *Cultural Atlas of Islam*³ is the expression of that approach. In addition to founding the Muslim Students Association, he also established the American Muslim College in Chicago, which tries to walk this ideological path. Thus, it may be suggested that *the fourth dilemma* is how to develop trained religious leadership with a common base.

The basic Muslim principle of equality means that there is a great latitude in Muslim religious structures. There is no single accepted authority and no common organization with power to act for the whole Muslim community. Each Muslim is

¹*Directory of Islamic Organizations, Islamic Schools, Masajid and MSA Chapters* (Plainfield, Indiana: The Islamic Society of North America, 1992).

²Y. Y. Haddad and J. I. Smith, "United States of America," *Encyclopedia of the Modern Muslim World* (New York: Oxford, 1995) 4:279, cf. 277-284. Yvonne Haddad is the main chronicler of the immigrant Muslim experience in the United States. The classic study of the African American Muslim experience is Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims* (Boston: Beacon, 1971). It is now supplemented by Amina B. McCloud, *African American Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

³Ismail al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

individually free and each mosque is independent. From time to time Muslims create networks and councils that help them respond to the need for common action, but many of them disappear quickly, and none commands the allegiance of a majority of believers. Thus in the United States various coordinating Muslim bodies have appeared, each doing their work as best they can. *The fifth dilemma* that Muslims face is developing better methodologies for mutual sharing, decision-making, and unified action.

In 1952 a Federation of Islamic Associations was established that drew some outside support from Egypt, but only about 50 mosques affiliated with it. A Council of Masajid (mosques) was formed in 1982 with Saudi assistance, but only up to 150 mosques affiliated. The Islamic Society of North America, founded in 1982 and headquartered in Plainfield, Indiana, is more prominent with about 350 groups affiliated as members. Such federations as these conduct conferences, sponsor journals, and disseminate information. Perhaps the most effective common movement in American immigrant Islam has been the Muslim Student Association founded in 1963, which is a trans-cultural, conservative-oriented body. It effectively organizes Muslim students on American college and university campuses, and continues working with alumni. In Canada the Council of Muslim Communities provides a coordinating function. Among other Muslim organizations are ethnic-based groups, and finally the usual Muslim divisions related to the distinction between Sunnīs, Shīʿas, and Sūfis. The vast majority of North American Muslims are Sunnīs, but there are also significant groups of Shīʿas in the United States, while in Canada there are about 80,000 Ismailis, followers of the Aga Khan, largely in Vancouver and Toronto.

Certainly the difficulty that is felt most immediately and personally by American and Canadian Muslims is the practical one of day-to-day obedience to the requirements of Islam. This is *the sixth dilemma*. For years, at a university in Canada, the writer conducted symposia in which Muslims would share their problems with students. In the main, they were very down-to-earth matters. Muslims spoke of a psychological feeling of restraint, the sense of having to be ever alert and careful. They felt, however, that other Canadians were sympathetic to their concerns when they were properly presented. They spoke of the problem of getting permission for noon prayer-time from their employers. They raised the issue of Muslim festivals—how to get time and space for their celebrations when the calendar does not recognize these major moments in Muslim life. They felt that the “frustrations of a minority” came into play especially in the area of religious education. They expressed the feeling that the most difficult time came at Christmas, when their children had either to be withdrawn or to participate in what is non-approved in Muslim faith. Another major problem area is personal law—marriage, divorce, and inheritance. The details of Muslim law do not always conform with the requirements of national law. Intermarriage with non-Muslims, now becoming common, is an especially delicate matter.

Muslims cited other areas of concern. A straightforward one is getting land for Muslim cemeteries. The Muslim dead are to be buried without embalming and

with their faces turned toward the direction of Mecca. Dietary concerns are present. No meat should be consumed that has not been properly butchered, that is, with the animal turned toward Mecca and the name of God recited. The free dissemination of alcohol, which many Muslims regard as forbidden, presents a problem, as does the use of drugs. In general, the breakdown of morality and order in life is a severe problem for Muslims. They particularly resent the sex obsession of American television. Premarital sex is forbidden by Islam, and Muslims do not appreciate its elevation to normalcy. They also have severe reservations about sex education in the schools. In the economic realm, the Muslim prohibition of interest raises questions regarding such ordinary things as savings accounts.

Perhaps the problem that nags the most in this country is the factor of media distortion and stereotyping applied to Islam and Muslims. This essentially cruel and mindless disease had reached almost epidemic proportions when Timothy McVeigh in Oklahoma City threw a dash of cold water into our faces, reminding us that extremism and terrorism are universal phenomena. One survey found that if there is one thing that Muslims would most of all like non-Muslims to accept is that they are not warmongers, but are generally a peace-loving people, and that Islam is a religion of peace. A Muslim says:

I would like to change the stereotyped image that people have of Muslims. If somehow we can tell the world that Muslims are no different than anybody else. There are some good Muslims out there, some bad Muslims out there, just like everybody else.⁴

The *seventh and final dilemma*, or set of dilemmas, has to do with the second stream of American Islam, namely, African American Islam.

IV. MUSLIMS IN NORTH AMERICA: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STREAM

African American Muslims represent about one-third of North American Muslims, or about 1-2 million people. Many of the dilemmas facing immigrant Muslims also apply to African American Muslims. However, African American Islam itself represents a form of dilemma for Islam by virtue of its history and approach.

The development of African American Islam goes back to the awakening self-consciousness of American blacks. That awakening was represented by movements such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association of Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). This had nothing to do with Islam directly, but it raised up the problems of blacks that eventually led to their consideration of Islam. Garvey and others aroused black pride and interest in African culture. He called for an independent black economy and proclaimed the values of racial separation. The ideas fell on fertile ground in places like Detroit. Southern blacks had emigrated north in World War I to take the jobs that were available in war plants. After the war they

⁴Y. Y. Haddad and A. T. Lummis, *Islamic Values in the United States* (New York: Oxford University, 1987) 159.

became unemployed, and the Depression confirmed their problems. The dissatisfaction in the northern ghettos was acute. Blacks blamed their problems on whites, and soon they began to identify them with the religion of the white majority, Christianity.

Another person entered the scene who was a bridge figure to African American Islam. He was Noble Drew Ali, b. Timothy Drew (1886-1929), who in 1913 founded a movement known as the Moorish Science Temple of America, in Newark, and it soon spread to other major cities. Moorish Science was a syncretic religion that drew on Muslim elements. The fact that Noble Drew Ali called himself a prophet, and the fact that the movement had its own sacred scripture named the Circle Seven Koran, placed it on the outer edge of Islam. However, it later became the seedbed for black Islam. Noble Drew Ali, who referred to Muslims as Moors and traced their descent to the Moabites, argued that only Islam could save the black people. For him that meant separation with coexistence, characterized on the Moorish side by the principles of love, truth, peace, freedom, and justice. The mark of the movement was the fez, as well as the use of the titles El and Bey affixed to personal names. Although this movement has waned, there are still some temples in the United States, many of which are located in prisons and correctional institutions.

The next two figures are the major founders of African American Islam, namely W. D. Fard, b. Wallace Dodd Ford (d. 1934) and Elijah Muhammad, b. Elijah Poole (1897-1975). Fard, who claimed to have been born in Mecca, came from California to Detroit in 1930 as a salesman. There he proclaimed the "Lost-Found Nation of Islam to the Wilderness of North America." In the same year he met Elijah Poole, who was an assembly line worker at a Chevrolet plant. The two frequented meetings of the Moorish Science Temple, although it is not clear whether or not they were members. Certainly they learned their Islam there, in its heretical form. Fard began to call himself a messenger from Mecca, the reincarnated Noble Drew Ali, the Mahdi and Messiah, and finally Allāh himself. Nothing could be more offensive to orthodox Islam. Elijah Muhammad, however, gave him this recognition and regarded himself as Fard's messenger. Together, in 1930, they established the first Nation of Islam temple in Detroit. That event marks the starting-point for a new phase in American Islam and American history. Fard took Noble Drew Ali's teaching farther, saying that not only must blacks be separate but they must also view whites as the Caucasian devil. White is evil; black is good. Negroes must henceforth refer to themselves as blacks, and they must prepare for war with Christian slave-owner/oppressors in a new Armageddon. Only in Islam could blacks find freedom, justice, and equality. Fard also founded the Fruit of Islam, a paramilitary organization, whose members call themselves the "warriors of Islam" and whose duty is to enforce morality and to provide security.

Elijah Poole, son of former slaves—his father was a Baptist preacher—took the Nation of Islam forward from this starting-point. His anti-white rhetoric was equally powerful and his black racism undeniable. The whites are the chosen people of Yakub the Devil, he proclaimed. He put his ideas forward in creedal

statements as well as rhetoric. The first part of the Nation of Islam creed⁵ is an affirmation of faith in Allāh, the Qurʾān, the prophets, and the scriptures, a mental resurrection and a judgment day. It is followed by a call for separation of black and white Americans, a demand for equal justice, and a rejection of integration as a social principle. To these beliefs Elijah added a strong emphasis on self-help and hard work, and the Nation of Islam operates many business enterprises. The other emphasis is on a puritan morality maintained by strict discipline. Today Louis Farrakhan is the successor to the leadership of the remnant of the Nation of Islam. Its public message today has moderated in the direction of cooperation and reconciliation, but essential ideas have not been formally changed.

The use of the term “remnant” is deliberate. It points to the fact that the majority of the members of the Nation of Islam took another road from that of Elijah Muhammad, and they no longer associate with its racist ideology. It is believed that only 50-60,000 American Muslims now belong to the Nation of Islam.

Outside of North America, Muslims looked at the American Islamic development with a certain wonder. American blacks, the majority Christian, were becoming Muslims for many reasons. The dominant one was a rejection of white racism. A second factor was the positive male self-image that came out of the adoption of Islam. The third was the effective work done by Muslims in solving black problems, including the rehabilitation of prisoners, the overcoming of drug use, and both economic and educational uplift. The fourth reason was the charismatic qualities of its leaders. Global Muslims approved of this development. There was appreciation for the fact that so many African Americans were choosing Islam as their faith. But they strongly – very strongly – disapproved of the basic teaching that black racism could be identified with Islam. This heresy struck at the heart of a fundamental Muslim principle, and immigrant Muslims in the United States shared the anger. As long as African American Muslims insisted on “black Islam,” so long would world Muslims keep it at arms length.

In 1964 a fundamental break in the pattern came when Malcolm X went on the pilgrimage to Mecca. There he experienced the reality of Islamic equality in action. He was moved to reject the racist position that he had cherished and represented so dramatically and to adopt the color-blind position of orthodox Sunnī Islam. This decision resulted in his famous rupture with Elijah Muhammad, and his death by assassination. The matter might have ended there, but the cudgels for orthodox Islam were taken up by Elijah’s seventh son, Warith Din Muhammad, born Wallace Muhammad, who succeeded to the leadership of African American Islam.

Wallace Muhammad proclaimed that his father’s views were essentially transitional, and it was now time for African American Islam to become fully identified with orthodox Sunnī Islam. In that light he replaced the anti-white slogans in the mosques with Arabic symbols; he instituted Arabic in the worship services; he changed the Nation of Islam ritual to conform with Sunnism; and he taught that there

⁵As noted by James Wright, student, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, 1995, in a class paper, the creed of the Nation of Islam is found on every back page of the Nation’s newspaper, *Final Call*. Wright, a prison chaplain, has gathered excellent materials on Islam in correctional institutions.

is evil in all people, white and black alike. In summary, he led an educational process to Islamicize or “orthodoxize” black Muslims which is still going on. The change in his approach is symbolized in the change of the official name of the black Muslims. It moved from Nation of Islam to American Bilalism (Bilal was the Ethiopian freed slave who first gave the call to prayer for the Prophet Muhammad); from American Bilalism to the World Community of Islam in the West (1976); from the World Community of Islam in the West to the American Muslim Mission (1980); and from the American Muslim Mission to the current African American Sunnī Islam or simply al-Islam. All these names referred to the same people, that is to the majority group who were once members in the Nation of Islam.

In the meantime Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam continue on their idiosyncratic way, attracting attention with their media-conscious attempt to lead African Americans, influencing American public opinion about Islam, and forcing orthodox and frequently embarrassed Muslims to respond defensively. The story of Farrakhan belongs as much to the history of American Christianity as to American Islam. Raised as Louis Walcott in West Indian-populated Roxbury, Massachusetts, Farrakhan was a dedicated Christian member of St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church and a gifted scholar-musician-athlete. He obtained a college scholarship to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where he came into direct contact with white racism. It changed his life. He is quoted as saying: “I saw the hypocrisy of the church, claiming the love of Jesus Christ, but practicing hatred. I decided that I would start looking for a religion that would satisfy me.”⁶ He came back to Boston, associated with a Roxbury Muslim named Malcolm X, and the rest of his history is joined with the Nation of Islam. It is an unfinished history, however, and its unopened pages undoubtedly hold new surprises for the development of North American religion.

While African American Sunnī Islam is now the largest black Muslim group, and the Nation of Islam the second largest, there are at least seven other sub-groups and several Sūfi groups⁷ in this complex social and religious movement. The kaleidoscopic picture underlines the dilemma faced by American Muslims in achieving the much-prized goal of Islamic unity. In that dilemma the largest question is the integration of immigrant Islam and African American Islam. The movement of the majority of African American Muslims in the direction of orthodoxy has opened the door for that integration to take place, and the first steps have already been taken.

To complete the profile of North American Islam we would have to deal with white converts to Islam, of which there are now a considerable number, and whose dilemmas are intimate and very real. We should have to mention the Ahmadiyya

⁶Malcolm Gladwell, “Louis Farrakhan’s Journey,” *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, January 22-28, 1996, p. 7.

⁷Haddad and Smith, “United States,” lists the following organizations: Daru Islam; Hanafi; Islamic Party of North America; Union of Brothers; Islamic People’s Movement; Five Percenters or Science of Supreme Mathematics; Ansaru Allah Community; Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (Qadariyya), and four other Sūfi groups. New sub-groups appear and disappear with regularity.

Muslims, a missionary movement of Muslims from Pakistan and India, who are viewed as borderline Muslims because they consider their founder (Mirza Ghulam Ahmad) to be a prophet. Nevertheless, they are zealous in their propaganda and their apologetics are influencing Muslims in general. Their problems are related to the fact that they are viewed as heretics by many orthodox Muslims, and they worship in separate mosques. Finally we would have to mention the large group of visiting students and teachers in the United States, who constitute a steady stream of influence on Islam in America, reflecting the emphases of their homelands.

V. CONCLUSION

We will now conclude this survey with the remark that the development of American Islam, because of its particular factors, makes it one of the most interesting phenomena in the present-day world of Islam. Its complexity and movement also make it one of the most difficult to understand in the present and to predict for the future. All our efforts to understand Muslims must finally focus on some individual and his or her point of view, and therefore the task of understanding calls for the building of individual relationships.

In general, Muslims in North America are concerned about the issues of assimilation and identity; the establishment of mutual support groups; the creation of good relations with the majority religion; the provision of reliable information about Islam, the elimination of false stereotypes, and the struggle against discrimination; the dealing with the internal problems of the Muslim community, especially the issues of unity, economics, and education; and finally and above all the maintenance of a basic loyalty to the goal of surrendering to God and obeying his will.

It is this spiritual dimension of life that Muslims in North America strive to maintain in the struggle between good and evil, and as they personally await God's summons to "the Abode of Peace." Every Muslim in North America would agree that *al-Fatiha*, the first chapter of the Qur'an, sums up the spirit of Islamic life in this and every nation:⁸

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,
Owner of the day of Judgment.
Thee alone we worship; Thee alone we ask for help.
Show us the straight path,
The path of those whom Thou hast favored;
Not the path of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.

It is this spirit that Muslims in North America are striving to express both in their religious life and in their life as responsible citizens, and to understand that basic reality is to stand beside and under our friends and neighbors. Standing beside and under we share our perception of how God has favored and helped humanity, and how we are to favor and help one another. ⊕

⁸Translation by Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran* (New York: Mentor, n.d.).