

## DIVERSITY WITHIN MUSLIM UMMA

by Phil Parshall



The Prophet foresaw the schisms that would arise among his disciples. In one of the most famous Traditions, Muhammad is reported to have said: “Verily, it will happen to my people even as it did to the children of Israel. The children of Israel were divided into seventy-two sects, and my people will be divided into seventy-three. Every one of these sects will go to Hell, except one sect.”<sup>1</sup>

The assumption by Muhammad was that heresy would be easily identifiable. All deviants would be consigned to Hell by the umma. Only true Muslims would be privileged to enter Paradise. In reality, heresy in a religion or ideology has never been easy to identify. There are many admixtures of doctrine, interpretation, and practice within any group. Purity is relative.

Within Islam, homogeneity and heterogeneity, unity and discord, love and hate all merge into that which is at once a religion, a worldview, a community, a ritual, and a code. For all, an overriding unity is a sought-after but elusive phenomenon. Most Muslims experience frustration that the umma of Islam falls short of the ideal of unity set forth by the Prophet.

### SHI‘A WITHIN ISLAM

The torches and weirdly lit banners, the bunch of black chains in the right hand of every man, the black garments, the glazed and exhausted eyes of the performers, and their drenched, sweating bodies signified a religious experience with which I was totally unfamiliar. Intense yet deliberate, the rhythm of the slow, liturgical chant never varied, its tempo ruled by the downward sweep of the chains, by the long, sustained cries of the leaders, by the thud of metal on flesh. In ancient and dignified figures, these young men were spelling out

once more for a million pilgrims the renunciation, the humility, and penitence which lie at the heart of Shi‘a Islam.

“Ohhhh—Husayn, most great, most honored, we grieve for thee,” called the leader, walking backward, step after measured step down the cleared aisle of the street. At this signal, the chains were swung like incense burners, across the body, out to the side; a silent half beat, marked by the thump of bare feet marching in unison, passed before the score of chains swung back to thud on the bared shoulders.

“Yaaaa—Husayn,” answered the young men. Their shoulders were bruised blue from the ritual beatings, the kerchiefs around their heads blotched from perspiration. Still they kept up the sustained note, the measured beat, and the chains swung again like censers. The chains thudded, the chant swelling higher from a score of throats, from a hundred, as the *taziyas* awaiting their turn inside the mosque were heard in the distance, in the silent half beats of the continuing ritual.

“Ohhhhhh—Husayn, our beloved martyr, we grieve for thee,” cried the leader. Tears streamed down the faces of sobbing men standing near me, and the piercing, wailing cries of the women spoke of loss and pain and grief and lamentation.<sup>2</sup>

Such was the experience of Elizabeth W. Fernea as she visited Husayn’s tomb at the huge Shi‘a pilgrimage center in *Karbala*, Iraq. A similar ritual occurs among Shi‘a Muslims throughout the Islamic world on the anniversary of the death of Husayn, their leader, hero, and, most importantly, martyr.

### THE QUESTION OF MUHAMMAD’S SUCCESSOR: THE SUNNI-SHI‘A SPLIT

It is important to realize that the initial and fundamental split between Sunnis and Shi‘a was over the question of succession. The issue was of a political

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Adapted from Phil Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 47–63. Used by permission.

nature. Today between 87-90 percent of all Muslims are Sunnis, while 10-13 percent are Shi'a.

Muhammad made no provision for his successor. This created the climate for Islam's first major crisis, as it tried to constitute itself as a major political-cum-religious combined force following the decease of its autocratic and charismatic leader.

Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman followed Muhammad successively in leadership. Upon the assassination of Uthman, Ali became the Caliph. He was a first cousin of Muhammad's, as well as a son-in-law of the Prophet through his marriage to Fatima. Immediately, Ali came into conflict with Muawiyah, the governor of Syria, who was also a relative of Uthman. It is at this point the divergence between Sunnis and Shi'a takes place. Ali is recognized by Shi'a as the first legitimate Caliph. Ali's son, Hasan, according to Shi'a, should have been the rightful leader, followed by Ali's other son, Husayn. In the critical historical moment when Husayn might actually have assumed such leadership, Muawiyah's loyalists killed Husayn and seventy of his followers at the battle of Karbala.

Shi'a take up their line from Ali the father and Husayn the martyred son. Sunnis, on the other hand, recognize the line of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, and Muawiyah.

Shi'a give the successors of Muhammad the title "Imam" rather than "Caliph." These Imams are historically regarded as infallible guides to all truth. The largest group of Shi'a believes that there were twelve of these Imams. The last one in the lineage was Muhammad al-Mutazar, who was also known as al-Mahdi (the rightly guided one). He was reputed to have disappeared (occultation) into the mosque of Samarra, Iraq, in A.D. 878. The "Twelver" Shi'a believe him to be still alive and actively engaged in guiding the believers. At the end of the age he will reappear and convert the world to Islam. Allegiance to him is a cardinal doctrine among those Shi'a who are specifically called the *Twelvers*.

### SHI'A DISTINCTIVES

Over the years of Islamic history there developed a number of Shi'a distinctives that have put some

distance between them and other Muslim traditions. For instance, their Qur'an contains a few variants when compared to the Qur'an used by the rest of the Islamic world.<sup>3</sup> Also, the Shi'a "have their own collections of hadith, composed during the tenth century, at a time when the Buyid *emirs* were masters of Baghdad."<sup>4</sup> A practice that separates some Shi'a from Sunnis has been that of *muta* or temporary marriage. This has particularly taken place among soldiers who were fighting a war far from family and home. A contract was drawn up and a stipulated sum of money exchanged hands. The period of time for which the marriage would be valid was written into the contract. Orthodox Sunni leaders have condemned the practice as tantamount to adultery.<sup>5</sup> The Qur'anic citation of Sura 4:28 has been interpreted as supporting the practice of *muta*: "Allah desires that he should make light your burdens, and man is created weak" (SHAKIR).

### AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI ON DISSENSION BETWEEN SUNNIS AND SHI'A

It is appropriate to give equal time to Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini [d. 1989], the most famous of all contemporary Twelver Shi'a, to present his case for the necessity of brotherhood among all Muslims, as they together wage war against the "agents of America and Zionism."

More saddening and dangerous than nationalism is the creation of dissension between Sunnis and Shi'a, and diffusion of mischievous propaganda among brother Muslims. Praise and thanks be to God that no difference exists in our Revolution between these two groups. All are living side by side in friendship and brotherhood. The Sunnis, who are numerous in Iran and live all over the country, have their own Ulama and shieks; they are our brothers and equal with us, and are opposed to the attempts at creating dissension that certain criminals, agents of America and Zionism, are currently engaged in. Our Sunni brothers in the Muslim world must know that the agents of the satanic superpowers do not desire the welfare of Islam and the Muslims. The Muslims must disassociate themselves from them, and pay no heed to their diverse propaganda. I extend the hand of brotherhood to all committed Muslims in the world and ask them to regard the Shi'a

as cherished brothers and thereby frustrate the sinister plans of foreigners.<sup>6</sup>

It could be stated that Khomeini is an advocate of pragmatic umma. He is looking on it as a unifying force to further his revolutionary goals. In actuality, current political alienations in the Muslim world contribute to religious divisiveness. In 1983, I visited a Shi'a mosque in Detroit. A huge portrait of Khomeini was hung in the outer room. Revolutionary literature was spread over a large table. It is obvious that no Iraqi Sunni Muslim would feel comfortable worshipping in the mosque, even though he has religious affinity on most doctrinal issues with his Iranian coreligionists. I could not help but contrast this with the spirit of brotherhood I observed during the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. At the conference, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, South Africans and Zimbabweans, East and West Germans, all believers in Christ, transcended normal political antagonisms and freely demonstrated the reality of the oneness of Christ that is commanded in John 17.

One further quote from a Muslim Seyyed Hossein Nasr who minimizes Sunni and Shi'a differences is given here with the aim of investigating primary sources, and allowing Muslims of varying traditions to speak to the issues under consideration:

Sunnis and Shi'a, both belonging to the total orthodoxy of Islam, do not in any way destroy its unity. The unity of a tradition is not destroyed by different applications of it, but by the destruction of its principles and forms, as well as its continuity. Being "the religion of unity," Islam, in fact, displays more homogeneity and less religious diversity than other worldwide religions. Sunnis and Shi'a are dimensions within Islam, placed there, not to destroy its unity, but to enable a larger humanity and differing spiritual types to participate in it. Both Sunnis and Shi'a are the assertion of the Shahada, *La ilaha illa Allah [(wa) Muhammad rasul Allah]*, expressed in different climates and with a somewhat different spiritual fragrance.<sup>7</sup>

## WAHHABIS

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was born at Ayinah in North Arabia in 1691. He was carefully instructed

in Islamic doctrine according to the Hanbali school, the strictest of the four schools of law. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab traveled extensively and studied at Mecca, Baghdad, and Medina. For a year he was recognized as an exponent of Sufism. In the end, he became a disciple of the ideas of Ibn Taimiyyah, a fourteenth century Hanbalite theologian who was a proponent of meticulously observing Islamic law and ritual.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was expelled from his hometown. He then took refuge in the village of Dariya, under the patronage of the local chief, Muhammad bin Saud.

This association was to determine the whole course of Arabian history. The Wahhabis, with the patronage of the Saud family, began to attack neighboring towns and tribes, and, as each town was reduced, Wahhabi doctrines were imposed upon it. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Wahhabis controlled most of what is now called Saudi Arabia. The name itself is suggestive: "The Arabia belonging to the Saud family." The Saudi family has controlled important parts of Arabia ever since, with two important interruptions. The first was the Turkish occupation (1818–33); the second was Muhammad bin Rashid's reign between 1891 and 1901.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was to purge Islam of any accretions which were added later than the third century of the Muslim calendar. He was horrified to note in his travels the aberrant practices of Muslims. The following list of rituals, beliefs, and prohibitions set forth by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab indicates his concerns regarding the Islam he observed:

- The four schools of law and six books of Hadith must be acknowledged.
- All objects of worship, other than Allah, are false, and all who worship other gods are worthy of death.
- To visit the tombs of Muslim saints seeking to please God and win his favor, is prohibited.
- Introducing the name of a prophet, saint, or angel into a prayer is an act of polytheism.
- Intercession may be made only to Allah.
- No vows may be made to any human being.

- It is unbelief to profess knowledge which is not based on the Qur'an and the Sunna.
- Attendance at public prayers is mandatory.
- Smoking tobacco is forbidden and can be punishable by up to forty lashes.
- The shaving of one's beard and the use of abusive language are prohibited.
- Alms are to be paid on all income.
- The use of the rosary is forbidden.
- Names of God are to be counted on the knuckles of one hand.
- Wahhabi mosques are built with great simplicity; no minarets or ornaments are allowed.
- Muhammad's birthday is not celebrated.
- The use of silk, gold, and silver is forbidden.
- Music is also disallowed.
- Anthropomorphic concepts of God are believed. Qur'anic texts about God's hand, his hearing and seeing, along with his ascent to the throne, are literally interpreted.
- Jihad or religious war is regarded as an obligation to be engaged in when necessary.
- Use of tombstones is not allowed.<sup>9</sup>

### STRICT LEGAL INTERPRETATION

Wahhabis are dedicated to the strict interpretation and application of Islamic law. At times Wahhabis have gone beyond the Qur'an in seeking to implement strict social codes. An illustration of this is the execution of the Arabian princess and her boyfriend for the sin of adultery. Such a stern and extreme punishment is not prescribed in the Qur'an. It would be accurate to perceive present-day Wahhabism as, most of all, a movement that favors conservative legal interpretation. Libya, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan are a few examples of states in which radical Islamic fundamentalism has been dominant. These countries are seeking to return to the original purity of early Islam. Oil funds are pouring out of Libya and Saudi Arabia for the support of Muslim missionaries. The worldwide program of building mosques is unprecedented in the modern era. If Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself were alive today and could observe the "Islamic Revolution," he indeed would be pleased.

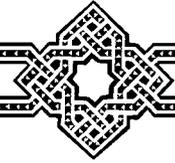
### AHMADIYA

Founder of the Ahmadi movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was born in 1839 at Qadian in Punjab, India. The title *mirza* indicates his ancestors came into India with the conquering Mughals. Ahmad received a good education in Arabic and Persian. He also meditated and pursued religious study. He was said to have frequently had a mystical experience of hearing voices which came from an unknown source. About 1880, he concluded that he was called of God for a special mission in life. Shortly thereafter, he published *Barahini Ahmadiyya*, which, in the initial instance, was well received by fellow Muslims.

On March 4, 1889, Ahmad announced he was the recipient of a divine revelation that authorized him to initiate disciples of his own. From that time forth, he began to expound a series of new doctrines. Soon he had attracted a very able group of followers. Opposition to Ahmad was quickly generated by traditional Muslims. This controversy raged until his death in 1908.

The Ahmadis teach several distinctive doctrines:

- No verse in the Qur'an is, or can be, abrogated. If one verse appears to be inconsistent with another, that is due to faulty exegesis.
- Jihad (or holy war) has lapsed, and coercion in religion condemned.
- To say that Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets does not mean that he is the last of them. A seal is a hallmark and he embodies the perfection of prophethood; but a prophet or apostle can come after him as did the Hebrew prophets after Moses.
- Jesus is dead, as are the rest of the prophets, and he did not ascend bodily into Heaven.
- Hell is not everlasting.
- Apostasy is not punishable by death.
- Any innovation in religious practice is culpable. The worship of saints is an invasion of the prerogative of God.
- Ijma or catholic consent is generally limited to the Prophet's Companions.
- Revelation will always remain a privilege of the true believer.



- Belief in Mirza Ghulam Ahmad al-Qadiani as the Messiah-Mahdi is an article of faith. Faith is incomplete without it.
- Spirituality in religion is more important than legalism. An Ahmadi need not belong to any particular madhab or school of law.
- The medieval Ulama need not be followed in the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith.<sup>10</sup> ♦

#### ENDNOTES

1. *Mishkatul-Misabih*, bk. 1, chap. 6, pt. 2.
2. Elizabeth W. Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1965), pp. 242–43.
3. Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Muslim Institutions*, trans. John P. Macgregor (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), p. 38.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
5. L. Bevan Jones, *The People of the Mosque* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1932), p. 135.
6. Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan, 1980), p. 302.
7. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (New York: Praeger, 1967), pp. 147–48.
8. Michael Nazir-Ali, *Islam: A Christian Perspective* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), p. 96.
9. Samuel M. Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1907), pp. 150–51.
10. Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1954), pp. 126–27.



**End of Online Reading 1 of 4 for Lesson 4. See LEARN MORE in the *Encountering the World of Islam* book, p. 166.**

## THE GROWTH OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ISLAM

by Keith E. Swartley



Until the last half of the twentieth century, the Muslim community in the United States was relatively small and had virtually no voice in American society. Since the 1960s, however, as a result of more liberal immigration policies, the Muslim immigrant community in the United States has grown substantially. Since the U.S. Census does not track religious affiliation, we do not know exactly how many Muslims are now residents. According to the Pew Research Center, there are around 2.8 million Muslims in the United States. Numbering approximately 560,000, African-American Muslims, are one of the largest and fastest growing groups of Muslims in the United States. Many have been converted to Islam in North American prisons, colleges, and urban neighborhoods.

Since September 11, 2001, many African Americans have taken a new interest in Islam. One pastor of an African-American church in Chicago says,

Before [September 11] the congregation had three members who converted to Orthodox Islam, so the appeal of Islam is not unprecedented. It has always made its mark in the black community of Chicago. But since September 11, the number of members converting to the Muslim faith has reached up to twenty-three per month. My colleagues in other districts are reporting similar dramatic increases. While it is ironic that a terrorist attack would herald the entrance of more converts into their faith, the issue perplexes me.<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim community has often credited Islam's simplicity, clarity, and equality for all races as reasons for conversion. Christian leaders have cited the apparent weakness or hypocrisy of the church as an

additional factor leading Americans from Christian backgrounds to convert to Islam.

American history also provides clues as to why Islam is attractive to the African-American community. Many present-day African-American Muslims identify Islam as the pre-slavery religion of their ancestors who were brought to the United States as slaves in the colonial period. While up to one-third of the slaves may have been Muslims, African Muslims were also widely involved in buying and selling slaves.

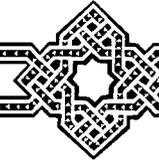
Most African-American Muslims today are orthodox Sunni Muslims, but, according to Carl Ellis and Adam Edgerly, founders of Project Joseph, African Americans were drawn to Islam by Black-nationalist movements in the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

### BIRTH OF BLACK MUSLIM NATIONALISM

After the American Civil War (1861–1865), the African-American church withdrew from cultural and social activism. This left a leadership void in the African American community, out of which black nationalist groups emerged in the early 1900s. According to Eric Gilbreath,

Between 1875 and 1900, there were three distinct traumas that radically altered the theological direction of the African-American church and paved the way for Islam's influence. First, there was the end of Reconstruction in the South, the rise of terrorism against blacks, and the re-establishment of white supremacy. Second, there was the Industrial Revolution in the North and the influx of European immigration, which led to the rise of white-only trade unions. Prior to this, it was African Americans who had held all the trade skills after slavery, but within one generation, these people were completely locked out of the skilled labor force. And third, the strong African missions work of the black church was decimated when the colonial powers consolidated their hold on sub-Saharan Africa and began barring entry to new African-American missionaries

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and expelling those already there. As a result of these traumas, the church became ingrown. It began to deal with the new slavery that had emerged after the Civil War and withdrew from the larger social concerns.<sup>3</sup>

In this void, Noble Drew Ali founded the first African American mosque in the United States in 1913—the Moorish American Science Temple in Newark, New Jersey. Ali claimed that all blacks were the descendants of the Moabites and Canaanites and that Islam was the original faith of all African Americans. After Ali's death, a man named W. D. Fard, claiming that he had been born in Mecca, gathered eight thousand followers in Detroit. Fard taught that blacks were the supreme race and that all whites were evil. Some of Fard's followers came to believe that he was the incarnation of Allah and the reincarnation of Noble Drew Ali. Fard disappeared in 1933, but the influence of his teachings continued through his disciple, Elijah Poole. The son of a Baptist minister in Georgia, Poole had moved to Detroit in 1923 to find work in the auto factories, as did many other poor African Americans. He met Fard there in 1931, became a member of Fard's inner circle, and later changed his name to Elijah Muhammad.

## THE NATION OF ISLAM

Continuing the black supremacist teachings of W. D. Fard, Elijah Muhammad mixed the biblical teachings of his childhood with those from the Qur'an to create a message of social empowerment and morality for impoverished African-American men. He gathered his followers into a tightly disciplined group known as the Nation of Islam and used this platform to address the cultural and social issues from which the church had withdrawn. Gilbreath again:

Christianity has done a good job addressing personal and spiritual matters, but for too long the church stopped dealing with the area of cultural and social issues. For example, things like Afro-centrism and pan-Africanism, which were basically a vision for missionary outreach to the African Diaspora, were originally Christian concepts. But the church withdrew from those ideas... and then the secularists and the Islamic groups came along and redefined them according to

their views. The African-American church forgot its own history; we withdrew from a position of social and theological leadership, and adopted the theology of the dominant culture, which tended to have a Euro-centric slant.<sup>4</sup>

It is the message of empowerment, morality, and male identity that attracts most African Americans to Islam. Most African-American Muslims today are not members of the Nation of Islam. Yet the pull of the black nationalist message is still current, as illustrated by Louis Farrakan's call for a Million Man March on Washington, D.C., in October 1995—a call to which 400,000 African-American Muslims *and Christians* responded.<sup>5</sup>

## MALCOLM X AND THE TURNING OF AFRICAN AMERICANS TO SUNNI ISLAM

How did the African-American Muslim movement change from a racist, cultic group in the early twentieth century to the mainstream Islam of today? The answer to this question is found in the life of another black empowerment figure, Malcolm X.

In 1947, Malcolm Little, the son of a Christian minister, was serving a prison term for armed robbery. He was introduced to the teaching of Elijah Muhammad by his sister and was soon converted. Five years later, when released from prison he became fully devoted to Elijah Muhammad and soon was chosen as the national spokesperson for the Nation of Islam. He also served in the prestigious position as minister of Temple No. 7 in Harlem. During his years of close association with Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm Little's name was changed to Malcolm X.<sup>6</sup>

A rising star in the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X popularized the movement in the press with his high-profile verbal antics. However, in 1963, Malcolm X confronted Elijah Muhammad over discrepancies between the leader's moral code and his sexual behavior. Soon after, Malcolm was suspended from leadership on the grounds that he had disobeyed instructions to stay out of the media spotlight following John F. Kennedy's assassination. He withdrew from the Nation of Islam in March 1964.

One month later, Malcolm X went on the Hajj. According to his wife, he went to Mecca a Black Muslim and came back a Muslim. On the Hajj, Malcolm X found people of all races following the orthodox teaching of Islam. He began to preach orthodox Islam and continued until he was assassinated the following year, February 1965. Elijah Muhammad led the Nation of Islam until his death in 1975, but Malcolm X's turn to orthodox Islam bore fruit after Elijah Muhammad's death.

Wallace D. Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad's son, was selected to fill his father's place of leadership. Wallace D. Muhammad's first goal was the complete integration of the Nation of Islam with orthodox Islam as practiced throughout the world. He moved away from racism. He embraced America and the millions of Muslims from many nations who live here. The Black Muslim movement of W. D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad was left behind. He was reaching forward to the global faith of all Muslims and considering what it could do for African-American Muslims.<sup>7</sup>

### WHAT CHRISTIANS CAN LEARN FROM AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSLIMS

According to Carl Ellis, the church's failure to accurately reflect God's image led the sons of two Protestant preachers to form the Nation of Islam. And Gilbreath points out:

If you look at Islam, the God it portrays suggests more of an Arabic tribal deity. American Christianity, on the other hand, has at times portrayed God with the images of a European tribal deity. So now here I am, an African American, and I've got to decide which one of these tribal deities I'm going to worship. Am I going to worship the one that looks like my oppressor, or the one that looks like somebody in my neighborhood?<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, many African Americans who are initially attracted to Islam do not remain in the Muslim community. Gilbreath continues:

What usually makes [Muslims] defect is when they discover that Islam is nothing but a works-righteousness treadmill. For those Muslims who

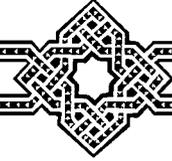
come to Christ, it's as if they hear Jesus saying all over again, "Come to me, all you who are weary and tired, and I will give you rest." I think a lot of them realize that, for all the ablutions and guidelines for diet and dress, when it's all said and done, they're just as much sinners as they were before.<sup>9</sup>

The African-American community has perceptively put its finger on the church's inadequate response to cultural issues in the United States. Yet the church seems to be rediscovering the Bible's message of morality and male identity, as seen in the multi-ethnic Promise Keepers men's movement, and in popular books like John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*.<sup>10</sup> Whenever the church fails to live out a biblical response to its current context, and to be relevant—not just to private personal affairs but also to public community affairs—it cedes its mandate to other movements, including Islam. Gilbreath concludes:

There are three things that a Muslim, a Hindu, or anybody else has no resistance against: the prayers of the saints, the love of the saints, and the wise application of biblical truth to their core issues—whatever those issues are. Every Muslim that I've met who came to Christ always came to Christ for one or more of those reasons, and the one that I hear mentioned mostly is the love. We should always remember that Islam is a system, but Muslims are people. We may not like the system, but the people we must love.<sup>11</sup> ♦

### ENDNOTES

1. Center for Ministry to Muslims, "The Impact of Islam on Black America," *Intercede* 18, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 2002), p. 1, 4–5. [cmmequip.org](http://cmmequip.org).
2. Adam Edgerly and Carl Ellis, "Emergence of Islam in the African-American Community," *ReachOut* 7, nos. 3 and 4 (Boulder, Colo.: Horizons International, 1994).
3. Eric Gilbreath, "How Islam Is Winning Black America: An Interview with Carl Ellis," *Christianity Today* (April 3, 2000). [christianitytoday.com](http://christianitytoday.com).
4. *Ibid.*
5. For statistics on the Million Man March, see [usatoday.com/news/index/nman006.htm](http://usatoday.com/news/index/nman006.htm). For information about who participated, see [usatoday.com/news/index/nman010.htm](http://usatoday.com/news/index/nman010.htm).
6. Center for Ministry to Muslims, "Impact of Islam," p. 4.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
8. Eric Gilbreath, "How Islam Is Winning."
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10. (Nashville: Nelson, 2001).
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**EXPLORE**

Carl F. Ellis, *Saving Our Sons: Confronting the Lure of Islam With Truth, Faith, and Courage* (Chicago: Urban Ministries, 2008).

Larry A. Poston and Carl F. Ellis, *The Changing Face of Islam in America: Understanding and Reaching Your Muslim Neighbor* (Camp Hill, PA: Horizon Books, 2000).

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**End of Online Reading 2 of 4 for Lesson 4. See**  
LEARN MORE **in the *Encountering the World of Islam* book, p. 166.**

# THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND REESTABLISHMENT OF THE CALIPHATE

by Frank Preston



In 1928, Hasan al-Banna (d. 1946), founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, outlining its political goals in his tract, *Toward the Light*:

1. Ending party rivalry and directing the political forces of the nation into a unified front.
2. Amending the law so that it conforms to all branches of Islamic legislation.
3. Reinforcing the armed forces and increasing the number of youth groups, igniting in them the spirit of Islamic jihad.
4. Strengthening the ties between all the Islamic nations, especially the Arab countries, to pave the way for a practical and serious consideration concerning the departed Caliphate.
5. Spreading the Islamic spirit throughout all departments of the government so that all its employees will feel responsible for adhering to Islamic teachings.
6. Keeping a close eye on the personal conduct of all government employees; there should not be any contradiction between one's private and professional lives.
7. Setting the hours of work in summer and winter ahead so that it will be easy to fulfill religious duties and bring an end to late hours.<sup>1</sup>

Though many points of the above proclamation could be concerning to segments of the international community, point four regarding for the reestablishment of Caliphate is of particular interest to this article. Reestablishment the caliphate is an often-mentioned objective of many modern Islamic groups, including radical groups like Al Qaeda. It is this single proposition that gives Hasan Al Banna the honor of being

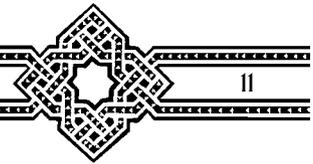
considered the father of modern revivalist movement within Islam.<sup>2</sup>

## THE CALIPHATE (632-1924)

When Muhammad died in 632, he did not leave clear instructions for the succession of his leadership.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent discussion among the early followers of Islam sought to determine whether the succession of leadership (the Caliphate) should follow the Arabian model of bloodline or whether the leader should be chosen solely by his ability to maintain the religious and philosophical tenets of the movement. The first four Caliphs were chosen by the Muslim leadership according to the latter criteria, but the selection of subsequent Caliphs deviated from this practice by choosing a leader who rose to power by military skill. Muslim groups reflecting on this dynamic argue that this change can be blamed for Islam's failure to achieve the religious and political domination envisioned by Muhammad.<sup>4,5</sup> Currently, there is still no consensus among Muslim leaders regarding the selection process of a Caliph.<sup>6</sup>

The Ottoman Caliphate, the final the seat of power for the Caliph, was moved to Turkey in 1517, where it resided for over four hundred years. As western powers weakened the Ottoman Caliphate through colonization of Islamic countries, Islamic theologians and reformers such as al-Afghani (d. 1897), Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), and Rashid Rida (d. 1935) sought to answer such questions as: What constitutes an Islamic state (Caliphate)? What qualities should a leader of Islamic peoples possess? Weak Caliphs who capitulated to colonial powers were considered takfir (apostate), causing the people to call for spiritual revival that would replace those "illegitimate" governments. Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh formed a secret society to launch jihad against European powers, believing they represented the era before Islam emerged in the sixth century. Their model was the Prophet Muhammad's war against the *kafir* (unbeliever) peoples in an effort for Islam to save all peoples, by force if necessary, as interpreted from the Qur'an.<sup>7</sup>

Frank Preston has been a missionary for 21 years in Indonesia. Currently he is a staff researcher with Pioneers. Pioneers mobilizes teams to glorify God among unreached peoples by initiating church-planting movements in partnership with local churches. Used by permission. [pioneers.org](http://pioneers.org)



By the late 1800s, the Caliph had become so impotent that Russian Tsar Nicholas I called the Ottoman Empire “the sick man of Europe.”<sup>8</sup> The final blow to the Ottoman Empire was the defeat in World War I, allowing for Turkish nationalists to establish the Republic of Turkey as a secular government. On March 3, 1924, the first president of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, abolished the institution of the Caliphate.<sup>9</sup>

Subsequent to this, several Muslim groups tried and failed to reestablish the Caliphate. Rasilh Rida made one such attempt in 1926 in Cairo. Though he did not accomplish a productive Caliphate consultation, he was successful in expressing his ideas on the Caliphate in a pluralistic modern era through publications that blended and modernized the ideas of scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), al-Ghazali (d. 111) and al-Mawardi (d. 1058). But unlike his predecessors, who felt power should radiate out from the Caliph to the Muslim population, Rida felt the credibility of the Caliphate would come from the spirituality of a purified Muslim population.<sup>10</sup>

## RISE OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

The loss of the Caliphate in 1924 grieved Hasan al-Banna, as it came after an unbroken chain of Caliphs that stretched over 1400 years back to Muhammad. Even so, he did not agree with Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdulh’s use of violence to reestablish it. Rather, he took his cues from Rashid Rida, who believed the decline in the Muslim community came not from Western influence nor illegitimate leadership—both external forces—but the problem lay within the Muslim community itself.<sup>11</sup> The umma needed personal reformation before leadership reform could take place. In 1928, al-Banna launched the Muslim Brotherhood as an internal jihad movement, seeking to reform the individual, who would reform his family, then the community, and then the country.<sup>12,13</sup>

Though al-Banna was a pious Muslim, he was not a theologian. He was a district administrator of education in Egypt. Being an effective administrator, al-Banna used a structured approach called *tarbiyya* (literally, a system of education) to manage training within the movement. The basis of *tarbiyya* was the small cell group, called an *usroh*, or “family,” that had a leader and about ten members. Four “families”

made up a “clan,” five “clans” made up a “group,” and five groups made up a “battalion.” All these reported to a branch manager, and ten branch managers reported to a district manager. This structure allowed for personalized mentoring of Muslims in the tenants of Islam, as well as the management and assurance of training quality and administration.<sup>14</sup>

Al-Banna’s vision for creating an Islamic movement that would eventually lead to the reestablishment of the Caliphate involved three stages:

1. Making known the ideas and goals of the Brotherhood among both members and outsiders (*ta’rif*);
2. Forming and sustaining an effective organization which would embody those ideas (*takwin*);
3. Putting into effect the ideas of the Brotherhood Society (*tanfidh*).<sup>15</sup>

This *tarbiyya* approach proved to be effective. By 1936, the Muslim Brotherhood had eight hundred members; just two years later, it is estimated they had over 200,000 adherents. By the end of World War II, it had two million members across the Islamic world. Chapters were opened in Lebanon (1936), Syria (1937) and Trans-Jordan (1946). Currently there are branches in over seventy countries and territories across the Islamic world. The Muslim Brotherhood is easily the largest Muslim organization in the world, with the June 2012 election of Mohamed Morsi at President of Egypt demonstrating its powerful influence. In the United States, some believe the Muslim Brotherhood controls eighty percent of the mosques and has over 175 front organizations.<sup>16</sup>

## RADICAL BRANCHES

In contrast to Hasan al-Banna’s personal jihad approach, Mawdudi (d. 1979) did not see internal reforms as key to the revival of the Islamic community. Instead, he believed the problem was both external non-Muslim governments and illegitimate Islamic leadership; therefore, he called for a jihad against them. Mawdudi represents the first clear strand of the modern interpretation of jihad used by Muslim radicals.<sup>17</sup>

Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), a leader in the Muslim Brotherhood, was frustrated at the lack of progress by the al-Banna method of reestablishing the caliphate. He adapted an ideology from Mawdudi, believing the concept of jihad must expand from being defensive, as during the life of Muhammad, to being offensive, as after his death. Qutb also drew on the twelfth century theologian Ibn Taymiyya's concept of jihad against Muslim takfir leaders and those who did not participate in expelling illegitimate rulers from Islam.<sup>18</sup>

Carrie Wickham argues that, unlike radicals who used violence to speed up the process of reestablishing the Caliphate, the Muslim Brotherhood's tarbiyya approach was a long-term strategy, systematically training personnel who would, over time, rise to influential positions in the private and public sectors. One organizer commented, "You raise *Ikhwani* (Brotherhood) students in the University, then five years later you have an electoral base for the professional associations. It is like planting seeds on the farm."<sup>19</sup> Reza Pankhurst observes that this has been a more effective approach than the "violence-based" approach of radical groups,<sup>20</sup> which was largely resisted by those nations' governments. The Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand, was more or less enabled by western powers to take political control of their countries, since democratic governments saw the Brotherhood as a pathway to democracy for despondent societies.

### UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF THE CALIPHATE

One has to keep in mind, though, that the Muslim Brotherhood's key objective—as well as many Brotherhood-spawned organizations, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Al Qaeda – was to reestablish the Caliphate. Ioannis Mazis argues that the confluence of the Arab Spring movement and the coalition of groups associated with the Qatar government and the Muslim Brotherhood under Morsi's leadership put the possibility of the reestablishment of the Caliphate within reach.<sup>21</sup> When I met with a senior Brotherhood leader in Indonesia, whose expertise is in Egyptian politics, he confirmed there were conversations about the Caliphate with the Morsi administration in Egypt and Recep Erdogan's government in Turkey. He added, though, that he did not think the Muslim Brotherhood had the political capital to execute the reestablishment of the Caliphate in the near future,

especially in view of the current demonstrations by secularist and moderate Muslims in both Egypt and Turkey against the fundamentalist Islamic overtures. Even though Morsi was ousted by mass protests on June 30, 2013, terms such as "Caliphate," "Sultan," and "Sharia" continue to be sprinkled among pro and con rhetoric in demonstrations around the Muslim world, indicating that al-Banna's vision of the Caliphate's return could be closer now than at any other time in history.

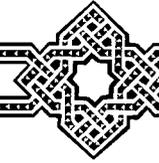
Mazis' report also offers good news to the above "bad news." Groups not aligned with the Brotherhood's vision for the world will find themselves outside the umma, as they define it, and will be looking for an alternative expression of religiosity. Mazis then refers us to a particularly relevant hadith which teaches that only one in seventy-three sects will be saved:

It was narrated from 'Awf bin Malik that the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said: "The Jews split into seventy-one sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy in Hell. The Christians split into seventy-two sects, seventy-one of which will be in Hell and one in Paradise. I swear by the One Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, my nation will split into seventy-three sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy-two in Hell." It was said: "O Messenger of Allah, who are they?" He said: "The main body."<sup>22</sup>

Many Muslim scholars reflect that this hadith means many Muslims will "fall away" from the faith in the last days, with the largest remaining sect being the right one. Some even imply that Muslims will fall away by becoming Christians. In many ways the reestablishment of the Caliphate is a mile marker that openness to the gospel will soon follow in those who do not agree with the Muslim Brotherhood view of the world. The church needs to prepare itself for Islamic movements toward Christ. ♦

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**End of Online Reading 3 of 4 for Lesson 4. See LEARN MORE in the *Encountering the World of Islam* book, p. 166.**

## MUSLIM IMMIGRATION: TENSIONS WITHOUT AND TENSIONS WITHIN

by Phil Lewis



The process of migration and the settlement of large British Muslim communities is a much more complex and demanding process for both newcomers and indigenous communities than we often imagine. Migration, after all, involves for many “a brutal bargain”<sup>1</sup>—the loss, over time, of familiar worlds, both for the established and for the newcomers as they seek a new way of life. This loss has been likened to a grieving process, which involves denial, anger, and acceptance, very similar to the familiar three-generation immigration process of avoidance, conflict, and accommodation.

Cities will often exhibit historical amnesia about the difficulties that previous migrant communities have suffered. Commenting on an earlier generation of Irish Catholics in Liverpool, one person reminisces:

When my mother was growing up in Liverpool in the 1930s, it was, she recalled, a sectarian world of segregated housing, working-class ghettos, and of name-calling and stone-throwing with children from local non-Catholic schools. [That] vicious religious divide had largely gone by the time of my own childhood there in the 1960s. While no one would want sectarianism back, it did engender a powerful and long-lasting sense of belonging to a culture and a community that defined itself by its Catholicism. My parents, for example, would never dream of going to a plumber, builder, dentist, or doctor who wasn't a member of the parish. Although our lives were largely circumscribed by the Catholic community, the presence of “different” neighbors alerted us to a sense of being a cultural minority. Our strength was that we felt a self-contained, self-sufficient

community. But we were curious about the Other. I remember sneaking alone into the darkened Protestant churches to see what they were like and whether the Devil might be found inside. [To me], immigrant culture is characterised by romance, nostalgia, and conservatism.<sup>2</sup>

### RELIGIOUS RELEVANCE IN A NEW LAND

Religious leaders often have difficulty connecting in relevant ways with a new generation born, educated, and socialized in the newly-adopted country. I will illustrate the challenges facing both imam and mosque by rehearsing the comments of well-placed people—some academics, some religious scholars themselves, and some activists, all with one exception: Muslims themselves.

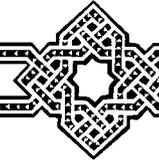
The imam should not be referred to as “Muslim clergy,” since he does not have pastoral responsibilities like Christian priests and ministers. In contrast to Christian models, the mosque is not a consecrated place; young people can pray just as well in a school building.

Many elders and imams alike are at a loss to know how to connect with the growing community of disaffected young Muslim men who self-describe as “rude boys” who mix three cultures: African-American hip-hop, Northern Pakistani, and [British] Northern Industrial.<sup>3</sup>

Shaykh Murad argues that young people need religious role models and that, in this regard, “British Islam has been rather unsuccessful.” American Muslims have produced far more articulate English-speaking leaders. Despite the proliferation of Muslim seminaries (more than twenty now), he notes that “we have not found one leader who can appear coherently on Newsnight, lead cheering crowds in Trafalgar Square, or galvanise teenagers and lead them in the direction of something that is mainstream, normative, and convivial.” Very often these seminaries in Britain

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Adapted from Phillip Lewis, “Being Church in a Muslim Area.” Paper presented at the Forming Transforming Churches Conference, Tyseley, Birmingham, England, March 2013.



largely mirror the content, teaching methods, and overall educational culture of the mother houses in South Asia. As a result, many British Muslim youth, alienated by the “old world” ethos, look elsewhere. Some are attracted by the cheap, accessible literature made available by the Saudis, which embodies a Wahhabi Islam embedded in a conservative Arab culture (which, for example, excludes women from driving – hardly a model for British Muslims). Such youth who align themselves with this well-resourced, Saudi expression of Islam find themselves doubly alienated from the Islam of their parents and from the wider society.<sup>4</sup>

A female Muslim academic, Dr. Sophie Gilliat-Ray, observes that “few imams have been trained in counseling skills or have the ability to relate Islamic law to the realities of contemporary Britain.” Moreover, she noticed that “those suffering the consequences of poor religious leadership were often the least empowered and the most in need within the community: young people and women.”<sup>5</sup> The crisis in religious formation was underscored by Ahtisham Ali, the Muslim adviser to the prisons. In an interview to a national newspaper, Ali explained the worrying escalation of young Muslims in prison: Muslims now comprise more thirteen percent of the prison population (roughly 10,500 people). Case in point, imams were simply not equipped to address key social problems in society, whether “family breakdown, arranged marriages, or drugs.”<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Abdullah Sahin, a Turkish theologian and educator, researched the attitudes of some four hundred Muslim students, aged sixteen to twenty, toward Islam. Most had parents from South Asia and lived in inner city Birmingham. He found that they fell into three categories:

1. One group believed in the basic tenets of Islam but did not participate in Islamic practice. Islam was more an identity marker than a personal commitment. He labels these *Low Commitment*, or *Diffused*.
2. Another group viewed Islam without any sense of difference between the ancient and modern world, seeing Sharia as unchanging and applicable to all times and places. They had religious commitment, but their lives showed little personal exploration. These usually envisaged an unbridgeable gap between an idealized Islam and the rest of society, which they dismissed as morally decadent. These he refers to as *High Commitment/No Exploration* or *Foreclosed*.
3. The third group tried to make sense of religion, aspiring to interpret Islam as relevant to their lives outside the home and their ethno-religious enclave. He calls this group *High Commitment/High Exploration*, or *Exploratory*.

Dr. Sahin then grappled with how to encourage the first two groups into the mode of personal exploration, as well as how to prevent the danger of the “exploratory” group losing either their commitment or their spirit of exploration. The challenge for the Muslim educator was to engage with the exploratory identity in their students. The traditional seminary approach, with its “teacher/text-centered approach and memorizing-based methods,” simply focuses on “the outward teaching of religion – memorizing a body of religious knowledge – rather than creating a dialogue.” In response, Dr. Sahin has developed a master of education program, with significant success, which helps Muslim students look critically at how Islamic disciplines developed historically and recognise the diversity of voices within the tradition.<sup>7</sup> This then gives them room to consider and navigate through the maze of living out Islam in a modern world with its pluralist societies. ♦

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Publishing Company, 2010), 165-183; 3) "Reflections on the Experience of Teaching the 'M.Ed. in Islamic Education: New Perspectives,'" *New Directions in Islamic Education, Pedagogy, and Identity Formation* (Leicestershire: Kube, 2013). I am grateful to Dr. Sahin for showing me this chapter before publication of his latest monograph.



**End of Online Reading 4 of 4 for Lesson 4. See LEARN MORE in the *Encountering the World of Islam* book, p. 166.**