

# A Century of Islam in America

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Although Islam is one of the world's greatest religions, numbering nearly a billion adherents or about a fifth of the world's population, it is not normally associated with the United States. But Islam is also an American religion. It has about three million adherents in this country [some authorities estimate 5 million] making it larger than say, the total membership of the Episcopal Church, or that of the United Church. About six hundred mosques and other Islamic centres are currently functioning throughout the country, the heaviest concentration is in the East Coast, the Midwest, the South and California.

The number of Muslims in America has risen dramatically in the last half-century through immigration, procreation, and conversion. About two-thirds of the total are immigrants from Muslim countries, mostly the Middle East, along with their descendants. The vast majority of the others are American converts, mostly Afro-Americans. If the Muslim community continues to grow at the present rate, by the year 2015 Islam will be the second largest religion in the United States.

Islamic scholars, students of religion, Middle East experts, and analysts of the American scene all tend to overlook the presence of Islam in America or to dismiss it as of only marginal interest. This may be due partly to two interrelated factors: the generally unfavourable media attention of Islam in the context of terrorism in the Middle East, and the desire of American Muslims to keep a low-profile. Nevertheless the Islamic phenomenon in America merits serious attention.

Hundreds of thousands of foreign Muslim students are currently enrolled in American universities and colleges. Many will be the future leaders of their countries. The experiences these Muslims take home shade their perceptions of what America is and how it relates to Islam. This factor will influence much of the Islamic world's responses to the American policy for decades to come. Meanwhile, these students constitute a hotbed of intellectual ferment about Islam and how it can and should respond to the challenges of the modern world. They are often among the most gifted representatives of their societies, and the quality of their American experience can be expected to influence a broad spectrum of future Islamic responses to the challenges of modern technology in history.

Another major issue is that of assimilation of American Muslims into the American environment. As Muslims they seek recognition and full participation in American society. But as matters stand at present, they see continuing inequities regarding their participation in that society. American spirit of religious tolerance, which they welcomed, does not equate for them the freedom of opportunity to practice their faith. In a country in which religion is so obviously valued, they experience frustration in attempting to practice their own. The American experience has moulded them into citizens responsive to American ideals of freedom and equality. Increasingly, they can be expected to hold their country accountable to those same ideals, as applied to them.

## Who are the American Muslims?

The Muslim discovery of America is a little explored topic. Some believe that it predated Columbus' expedition. Records note the arrival as early as 1717 of Arabic-speaking slaves who would not eat pork and believed in Allah and Muhammad p.b.u.h. According to some estimates, as much as a fifth of all the slaves introduced into the Americas, from Africa in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, may have been Muslims. Many of them went to South America. Those who went to the American colonies were, by and large, quickly converted to Christianity. Only a few vestiges of Islam, such as a Qur'an which was apparently written down from memory, remain from this period.

## Immigration during the last century

Muslims from the Middle East began to migrate to the United States in about 1875. The first wave came primarily from what was known as Syria, which was later divided into Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. Most were migrant labourers, uneducated, unskilled, and from peasant backgrounds. Motivated by success stories brought back from Lebanese Christians who had preceded them, they expected to achieve a degree of financial prosperity and then return to their native countries. Lacking proficiency in English, many became peddlers. Others found employment in factories and mines, or became grocers or shopkeepers. Their willingness to work hard often brought not only capital but improved social status and living conditions. Many

who had intended temporary stay soon knew they would not leave. Those who did return to their homelands encouraged others to venture forth.

Historic events periodically interrupted this flow of immigration and changed its character. The First World War ended the first major wave; the second, which peaked in the 1930s, was brought to a halt by World War II. During much of this time, immigration laws were blatantly discriminatory. Some hopeful immigrants were turned back at Ellis Island, and in many cases Middle Easterners found it difficult to obtain citizenship. At one point, they were denied citizenship because officials, using the criteria of colour and shape of nose could not determine which race they belonged to. Restrictive laws limited the number who were allowed to enter, with preference given to relatives of earlier immigrants.

The third wave of immigration, which took place between 1947 and the mid-1960s, effected changing circumstances in Muslim countries. Many who left their homes during this period did so to escape political oppression. Unlike the earlier immigrants, they were often well-educated and from influential families. The largest group consisted of Palestinians displaced by Israel, but there were many from other lands, such as Egyptians whose property had been nationalized by Naser; Iraqis fleeing their country after the 1958 revolution; Syrians of position who had been excluded from government participation; and East European Muslims from countries like Yugoslavia, Albania and the Soviet Union, escaping from communist rule.

#### **Fourth wave**

The Johnson Administration introduced many changes in the immigration laws. The requirements of the U.S. labour market and a potential immigrant's ability to fill established need became major determinants of the would-be immigrants admissibility. Thus, the fourth wave, which began in 1967 and continues to the present, consists mainly of those who are educated, fluid in English, and Westernized. They came from a wide variety of countries, including many beyond the Middle East. These Muslims have not come to make a fortune and return home, but to settle, to participate in American affluence, and to obtain higher education and advanced technical training for specialized work opportunities. Many are also seeking freedom from what they see as oppressive ideologies in their places of origin. There are of course some exceptions such as some of the Lebanese Shi'ahs and Palestinians displaced by the

conflict in Lebanon, most of whom are illiterate and unskilled.

Muslim immigrants have adapted their religious practices to the requirements of American society in varying ways. The earlier immigrants tended to settle with fellow Muslims, if possible with those of similar ethnic backgrounds, but were generally too busy with basic economic survival to make much attempt to promote Islam on a community level. This factor, plus their relatively small numbers and the fact that many of them saw their American residence as only temporary, inhibited the establishment of Islamic organisations. But as the number of permanent immigrants increased, so did the awareness that the perpetrators and of their faith could only be maintained by the initiation of new, native-born generations into the fold. Those who intended to stay, thus began gradually to develop the organisations and institutions required to preserve the faith.

#### **Islam in the African-American Community**

A substantial minority, perhaps a third of the Muslim community in the United States, consists of individuals, primarily African-Americans, whose forebears had been in America for generations but who converted to Islam only during this century.

Timothy Drew, a poor Northern Carolina black born in 1886, was the first to invoke what he understood to be the Islamic principles as a means of uniting Americans of African heritage. Changing his name to Noble Drew Ali, he founded the Moorish-American Science Temple in Newark, New Jersey in 1913. He believed that "for people to amount to anything, it is necessary for them to have and name and a land," and he asserted that blacks were really "Asiatics." He called on his brethren to deny any designation save that of Asiatic, Moorish, or Moor. Islam is the religion of the Asiatics, he insisted while Christianity belonged to the white man. Although his movement was patterned more on a combination of Eastern philosophies than on normative Islam, Noble Drew Ali's intention was to find a means of uniting an oppressed people, giving them a source of pride and an outlet for individual contribution. The Moorish-American movement spread to a number of major Northern cities, including Philadelphia in Detroit, as well as some in the South. Eventually, the movement was overtaken by its successors, it is now limited to a few small groups in various East Coast urban areas.

Shortly after Drew Ali's death in 1929, a movement was begun in Detroit by a man most likely of Turkish or Iranian origin. He had been variously known as W. D. Fard, Ali Fard, Wallace Fard and W. F. Muhammad. Claiming to have been born in Mecca of an Arab father and a European mother, he preached doctrines that were only marginally Islamic. He maintained that African-Americans were in reality Muslims who had been separated from their true identity and must be brought back into the fold. The movement was, therefore, named "The Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of North America." The leadership of the group was assumed by Elijah Muhammad, born Elijah Poole in Georgia in 1876. Fard proclaimed Elijah Muhammad to be the "Messenger of God" who was to bring the black nation to a realisation of its true nature. The hope was that this new Muslim Organisation would help African-Americans to find a new way of life stressing self-respect, economic independence and ethnic integrity.

The doctrines espoused by Elijah Muhammad were often in sharp contrast to the egalitarian principles of mainstream Islam. The white man was seen as Satan, a perspective that understandably appealed to at least some members of a community that had long suffered discrimination at the hands of a white majority. Hundreds of thousands looked to Elijah Muhammad for guidance. They viewed his movement as a way out of the ghetto, and as a means of rising above past suffering, of affirming an authentic identity long obscured by white oppression. [The movement has now assumed the name of 'Nation of Islam']

### **Nation of Islam**

The Nation of Islam built numerous mosques and temples in some of America's most depressed areas. Its message of hope and its call to conversion and transformation even reached into the prison system. However, not only the outcasts of society responded to Elijah Muhammad's call. As the movement spread, prominent professionals and educated Americans of African heritage joined it, including many leaders of the contemporary African-American community. Elijah Muhammad demanded total commitment from all converts. He taught that only by the association from a degrading past could their potential for dignity and self-reliance be realized. Hard work was the only acceptable way to a higher standard of living; men and women were to respect the special role for which they were created, treating each other accordingly. Stressing

individual redemption, Elijah Muhammad demanded that the converts maintain the high ethical and moral standards they needed to achieve a sense of dignity and self-worth.

One of the most serious problems the organisation faced was the refusal of many Americans to recognize it as a legitimate entity, while Christians, other African-American leaders, and immigrant Muslims all perceived the movement as a threat, direct or indirect, to their own interests. Members of the immigrant Muslim community viewed the Nation of Islam as a sectarian religion holding some superficial commonalities with Islam but with racist doctrines, attitudes directly in conflict with the true faith.

Not all the movement's problems arose from outside hostility. Malcolm X, who was Elijah Muhammad's most prominent disciple, nearly led the nation to schism. Learning about Islam while in prison, Malcolm became one of the most articulate and committed of these Elijah's Ministers.

In 1963 Elijah suspended him from the Nation for a speech about the Kennedy assassination in which he said, "The chickens have come home to roost." Shortly after that event, Malcolm travelled to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage, and encountered an Islam markedly different from that preached by Elijah. His experience of the brotherhood of believers, blind to colour and distinctions, led him to reject the concept of an inherently evil white race. He finally broke with the Nation when, with bitter disappointment, he heard about sexual indiscretions by Elijah, the "Messenger of God." In 1965 Malcolm X was assassinated at a religious rally. Two members of the Nation of Islam were convicted of the murder.

### **Transitional Stage**

Elijah Muhammad died in 1975, and his son, Wallace (Warith) Deen Muhammad, assumed leadership of the movement. Warith Deen Muhammad recognised the importance of bringing the Nation of Islam into the mainstream of Islam and immediately began to difficult process of closing the gaps between his brother's doctrines and orthodox Islam, the Quranic teachings (of a) world Muslim community, rather than as a strictly black nationalist movement. Warith D. Muhammad and Malcolm X shared their thoughts and ideas and the latter's influence was visible during this transition.

Warith Deen Muhammad had studied Arabic, the Qur'an, and Islamic law for many years, and used what he had learned in the personal title he now assumed *Mujaddid*, renewer of the faith. The name of the movement itself went through various changes: Lost-Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of ??? Islam," then it became "The American Bilalian Community" (referring to Bilal, the first black convert to Islam at the time of the Prophet p.b.u.h.) [and one of the leading Companions and the first *mu'adhdhin* of Islam]; then "the world Community of Islam in the West" (1976), "The American Muslim Mission" (1980). In 1985 the movement was officially integrated into the general Muslim community in the United States. Its members are now known simply as Muslims.

Under Warith D. Muhammad's leadership, temples became *Masjid* (pl. *Masajid*) or mosques; ministers became *Imam's*; and the official newspaper *Muhammad Speaks* became the *Bilalian News*, later *The American Muslim Journal*, and now *Muslim Journal*. The World Community of Islam in the West achieved long-awaited public recognition from immigrant Muslims. At the 1976 meeting of the American academy of Religion in New Orleans, Warith D. Muhammad declared his bothers teachings to have been wrong. Acceptance of both the leader and the organisation has since reached the international level. Warith D. Muhammad has been authorized to certify American Muslims seeking permission to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and to act as a trustee for several Persian Gulf states' funds being made available for missionary work in the United States.

Not all members of Elijah Muhammad's movement agreed with the changes his son introduced. One significant segment, led by Minister Louis Farrakhan, has continued to espouse Elijah's original teachings, and has maintained the Nation of Islam's name as well as its basic organisational structure. Farrakhan preaches that blacks world-wide are oppressed by whites, and seeks a separate state for African-Americans.

### **Basic Goals**

Farrakhan and Warith D. replaced racist tenets, which were explained as a part of a transitional stage required to lift African-Americans out of the mentality of subjugation. The Nation of Islam gradually became recognised as a legitimate part of the (inheritage) Muhammad p.b.u.h. (trying to) share the basic goals of freedom and dignity for their people, but their constituencies, as well as their approaches differ. The

American Muslim Mission has tended to attract a larger number of the middle classes, while the Nation of Islam under Farrakhan is primarily a movement of the unemployed underclass fighting against perceived white oppression. Until recently only the American Muslim Mission has enjoyed a measure of recognition internationally, as well as from American immigrant groups and other entities of importance in the domestic political arena today. However, Louis Farrakhan has brought media attention to the nation - however controversial - through association with political candidates and through speeches often characterized by the media as anti-Semitic and racist. He has also been accorded international recognition in the form of aid from Libya, a development that seems to have moderated his earlier practice of criticising aid to other American groups from Arab governments.

The schism between the two organisations has widened, with each striving to become a majority representative of the African-American Muslim community as a whole. The American Muslim Mission currently is suffering from a lack of strong central leadership, brought on in 1983 when Warith D. Muhammad unexpectedly stepped down from its top command and moved from its Chicago headquarters to California. On the other hand, the Mission's Willingness to co-operate with other Islamic groups gives it certain advantages over Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, which favours complete independence.

Since the official disbanding of the American Muslim Mission as a separate and identifiable group, immigrant organisations have made more effort to affiliate black American Muslims to them. For example, and Islamic centre developed in northern New Jersey and financed by the Muslim World League is multiracial and provides education through an Islamic school which has quickly established itself as superior to the education provided by the public school system.

Fortunately for the indigenous Muslims, the decentralisation carried out by Imam Warith D. Muhammad has not seriously impaired the effectiveness of their nation-wide school system known as the Clara Muhammad Schools. There are an estimated 50 to 60 such schools academically certified throughout the U.S. which provide an Islamic curriculum ranging from elementary in some cases, to mid-level and high school in others. Although these schools also operate independently from any central authority, the curriculum is basically the same and generally in keeping with Islamic academic institutions whether established by indigenous or immigrant Muslims.

Perhaps one of the most important observations regarding the indigenous Muslims is the phenomenal impact they have made upon the moral and social fabric of the society as a whole. In recent years for instance, Muslims representing a variety of indigenous groups have received considerable attention and praise for their organised success in combatting drugs in the inner cities like New York, Washington DC and Chicago.

### **White Converts**

Conversion to Islam within America has not been restricted to citizens of African heritage. Various Muslim leaders have estimated that there are between 40,000 and 75,000 converts from among the white population, the majority of them women. While some observers maintained that most of these conversions come through intermarriage, a survey among a small number of women converts found that the majority converted to Islam prior to finding a marriage partner, and that many considered the role and status of women as defined by Islam to be superior to what they experienced in American society.

Some young Americans, notably in the age group alienated in the 1960s, have converted to Islam after experimenting with a variety of cults and subcultures. They have been attracted to and in some cases established *sufi*, or mystical, sects of the faith. Immigrant Muslims committed to a legalistic understanding of Islam disown these groups. There are also other *sufi* groups in America consisting mostly of *sufi* immigrants from Asia and Africa. Among America's several *sufi* cultures, the largest is the Bawwa Muhyyiddin fellowship, headquartered in Philadelphia. Others are found in such places as Albuquerque, Upstate New York, Texas, California, and Michigan.

### **Foreign Muslim Students**

This group, while not strictly speaking part of the American Muslim community, plays an important role in the life of that community. For example, in their search for centres for prayer and Islamic instruction, many foreign Muslim students have made resident American Muslims more conscious of their Islamic identity. And their perception of how their religion is practiced in America can prove significant in future years, after these potential leaders have returned to their native countries.

Statistics are available only for a few countries. For example, in 1984 there were about 10,000 Saudis and

20,000 Malaysians studying in the U.S., and in 1987 there were 50,000. Reliable estimates of the size of the total community of foreign Muslim students are simply not available. Estimates range from a high of 750,000 to a low of 150,000.

Student groups such as the Muslim Arab Youth Association (MAYA) and the Malaysian Islamic Study Group (MISG) have emerged within the ISNA [Islamic Society of North America] family. Each holds an annual conference as well as other events.

### **The Adaptation of Islam to America**

Islam's inherent flexibility, which has historically helped it to flourish and expand, has assured its survival in the very different social and cultural environment of the United States. Thus the immigrant Muslim community, which developed primarily during this century, had inevitably absorbed elements from the dominant American Christian culture. Somewhat the reverse process has occurred within the Muslim community of African-Americans, which grew during roughly the same period, in that process involved adopting Islamic precepts and practices and integrating them into an American subculture.

The issues Muslims in America have faced in adapting their religion to the American scene have involved both practice and precepts, as illustrated by the following examples:

(i) mosques in America have taken on certain nontraditional functions that are normal for Christian churches. Weddings and funerals are held in mosques; Sunday morning religious education classes and meetings are offered in addition to the regular Friday services; funds are raised, generally by female members of the centre, through bake sales, bazaars, community dinners, and cultural events.

(ii) the role of the *imams* has been enhanced. In the Muslim World that role is normally centred on leading prayers and instructing members in the Qur'an and Islamic Law. In America, however, the religious leaders maintain the mosques, provide counselling services similar to those offered by the Christian clergy, and act as Islamic spokesmen to communities in which Islam is little-known and even less understood.

(iii) a substantial number of communities that wanted to build a mosque have obtained bank loans for the purpose, despite Islamic injunctions against usury.

## Practical Problems

Although such adaptations have facilitated the practice of Islam in America, a variety of practical problems remain, such as the following:

(i) Substantial discrepancies exist between American civil law and Islamic law on such matters as divorce, alimony, child support in custody, marriage, inheritance, and abortion. While civil law is designed to be separate from religion, Islamic law is based on the teachings of the Qur'an and accepted by Muslims as God's guidance for humankind. Conflicts between religious conscience and obeying the law of the land are often not readily resolved.

(ii) The basic obligation of daily prayer presents great difficulties in practice. Such prayer should be observed five times a day at prescribed intervals, including noon and early afternoon. Ablutions - the ritual cleaning up hands, feet, elbows, ears, face and head - are required before praying. This is often difficult or embarrassing in the workplace. The problems are compounded by the ritual requirement that the place of worship be clean and free of any pictures or portraits.

(iii) These Muslims who try to fulfil the obligation to fast from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan frequently encounter job-related problems.

(iv) For most Muslims, traditional Friday midday prayer services conflict with job responsibilities. The same is true of the principal Muslim religious holidays, unless they happen to occur on a weekend. While major Christian and Jewish holidays are recognized by most employers, as a general rule, this has not been the case for Muslims.

(v) American dress, dating practices, and the tendency toward interfaith marriage deeply concerned some Muslims. The Quranic injunction against Muslim women marrying non-Muslims has created a major problem in some immigrant communities where many of the young men have married outside the community; in some cases Muslim grooms have had to be imported from overseas.

(vi) Muslims may not eat pork or pork products, and the meat they do eat needs to be *Halal*, that is, properly slaughtered with appropriate mention of the name of God. Such meat is available in a limited number of cities. Muslims generally buy Kosher meat and sanctify it by reciting the necessary phrase according to Islamic

custom. Bakery products can be a problem as they often contain lard, frequently without proper labelling. Avoiding such products is especially difficult for Muslims in institutions. Muslims are also supposed to abstain from alcohol, which can present difficulties in a society where alcohol is an integral part of the social and business scene.

On a more philosophical level, the committed American Muslim often finds it difficult to reconcile Islam with what he sees as excessively materialistic attitudes that pervade much of American society. He sees the American commitment to individualism as extreme, and exercised at the expense of the community. He worries about the integrity of his family unit, the cornerstone of the Muslim community, which he sees as being undermined by a liberalism of American society.

To ensure proper instruction and an appropriate environment for their children, several immigrant communities have set up or are setting up Islamic schools. Elijah Muhammad succeeded in doing this also in many areas of the Nation of Islam. While Warith D. Muhammad set the goal of establishing one Muslim school for each of his movement's mosques; that aim has not been realised.

## Perceptions of Public Prejudice

The growing Islamic community in America has received and welcomed the message that America is a secular and pluralistic state that tolerates all religions and ideologies. At the same time, the community is becoming increasingly fearful that American prejudice against their faith is growing. They are concerned over insensitive and racist statements on radio, television and in the press. They see media coverage of terrorist attacks by Muslims abroad, and particularly what is identified as "fanatic Muslim fundamentalism," as unbalanced and prejudicial, increasingly causing other Americans to equate Islam with terrorism.

Specific problems reinforce their concerns. Muslim children report having nightmares because their Judeo-Christian classmates harass them in school and the playground. In the last five years, American mosques have been stoned, trashed, shot at with BB guns, and in one case bombed.

Some local residents have responded with support for the Muslim communities, but Muslims see no effort above the local level to deal with the increasingly

pervasive problem of anti-Muslim prejudice. No committees have been set up to sensitise the American public about discrimination against Muslim fellow-citizens on account of religion. There has been no Congressional investigation or hearing. On the contrary, government officials continue to talk about America as a "Judeo-Christian nation," effectively leaving Muslim (and other) religious groups out of the running in a supposedly secular and pluralistic society.

One specific irritant is the tendency of some Christian preachers of the electronic church to proclaim the state of Israel as the fulfilment of Christian messianic hopes. Support for Israel, regardless of the legality or justice of its policies and the treatment of its Arab subjects, is taken by some Muslims as confirmation of what is characterized as the "Judeo-Christian conspiracy against Islam."

Muslims in America, like Muslims everywhere, see a close relationship between religious values and social economic concerns. They see Christian preachers like Jerry Falwell using religion to buttress their social commentary, and wish to exercise what they see as their right to affirm Islamic principles as the basis for their own analysis of current issues. Sensing public disapproval of their efforts to exercise this right, they consider this disapproval to be unfair and un-American. This they view in the context of broader spectrum of continuing inequities affecting and limiting their ability to participate in American public life.

### **Frustration**

In a country in which religion is so obviously valued, Muslims wonder why they should experience so much frustration in attempting to practice their own. They feel unhappy that while they are asked to serve in the nation's Armed Forces, *Imams* are not part of the military chaplaincy, as are priests, pastors, and rabbis. Increasingly aware of present limits on their ability to participate in the nation's public life, they are seeking full recognition in all spheres. Now that they have become economically integrated and fully able to serve the needs of their country, will they continue to be regulated to marginal status? Or will they become full members of the community, with active and recognised participation in its social, political and intellectual arenas?

This situation affects Muslims in the rest of the world, as well as those in America. Muslim societies in Third

World countries, informed by modern international telecommunications networks, are watching not only how American foreign policy is formulated and implemented overseas, but also how America is living up to its democratic ideals in its treatment of its own Muslims at home. And these audiences are not dependant on the media alone. Most immigrant Muslims in the U.S. retain strong ties to family and homeland, and there is no lack of personal communication between them and their friends and relatives in their home countries. Finally, Muslim students and other Muslim visitors in the United States quickly become sensitised to the growing distress of their co-religionists who have chosen to settle in America.

### **Foreign Students in America**

The perception that the American public is prejudiced against Islam is helping to crystallise a commitment by many Muslims to Islamic radicalism. This is particularly evident among foreign students on American campuses.

Ever since the early 1950s, Muslims students from Third World countries have been flocking in increasing numbers to the United States for technical and professional training. In the process, certain American campuses as well as some of the mosques and Islamic centres associated with them have become important locales for theological reflection and for debate on a variety of Islamic world views. Shielded from the watchful eye of the police in their homelands, Muslims students in the United States have been reunited into a variety of Islamic organisations, covering a spectrum running for moderate groups like ABIM of Malaysia, Jamiyat al-Islah of Kuwait, the Jama'at al-Islami of Pakistan, and the Muslim Brotherhood to radical groups banned in many Muslim countries, including Jihad, Takfir wal Hijara, and Hizbullah. Here they are able to forge links with students of other nations providing the nucleus for an international network of leaders committed to the creation of an Islamic state, or an Islamic world order.

Prior to the Second World War, earlier generations of Muslims students found in Europe, especially in France, models for a secular nationalism in which separate ethnic identities were subsumed under the ideal of a single state. The post-war Muslim experience of the United States appears to be different. America is experienced not as a secular but as a religious society. Churches with active and sizable congregations provide a focus for much of the nation's social organisation and

activity. While the Muslim student may not be aware of the historical circumstances, theological conflicts, sociological conflicts, or sociological factors that determine the way these churches develop their present role he does see that it is possible to forge one nation out of a variety nationalities, a nation self-consciously described as under God. And this aspect of how he experiences America can have a profound influence and how he experiences Islam later in life.

On a practical level, students who return home may seek to replicate some of the adaptation Islam had made to American ways. At least five "full-service" mosques, for example, have been established in Cairo in the last few years. These provide a variety of services including tutoring, Quranic studies, marriage ceremonies, counselling, and free medical care.

### **Christian Fundamentalism**

The growing phenomenon of Christian fundamentalism in America, most conspicuous in the medium of the electronic church, appears to be influencing many Muslims students on a more profound level. Some of the students can themselves be characterised as "evangelical," in the sense that they openly announce that they are "born-again" Muslims, or talk about bringing about the "kingdom of God" on earth. (Such affirmations are not traditional Muslim definitions of the faith; "new birth" to Islam appears to occur only in the United States.) Many students, including any substantial number that had never been to a mosque or practiced Islam before they came to America, report that their American experience has led them to search for identity and religious roots.

It is not that young Muslims will come to America experience the religious messages preached on radio and television as poignant or relevant. On the contrary, such messages appear offensive in that they can only be characterized as hostile to Islam. What is happening is that some of the students are absorbing the process as opposed to the content, and taking it as a new and harmful vehicle for proclaiming the salvific power of Islam. The chosen medium of ultra-conservative Christians is thus becoming a formidable tool in the hands of revivalist Muslims, a process by which they become a kind of mirror image of their Christian counterparts. Often, this newly acquired mode of expression is retained when they return to their home countries and adopted as their chosen medium for revolutionary rhetoric.

These Muslims students are absorbing the notion that Christianity is hostile to Islam, and translating it into hostility towards America and towards Christianity in general. Many of them are being turned by their American experience into anti-Western, anti-Christian Islamic revivalists. The consequences for American foreign policy interests in future decades are potentially very serious. The root of the problem is the perception of many resident Muslims that the nation as a whole is prejudiced against them.

If these factors can be reversed, and that perception overcome, future Muslims students will hopefully carry home a better impression of America, that will be more congenial to the nation's long-term interests.

### **Conclusions**

Increasingly conscious of their own identity, America's Muslims wait for the day when their presence will be recognised, or as one Muslim put it, "for the day people will talk about America as Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim." Until the present, Muslims have not played an effective role as a community in the nation's political process. However, they are beginning to understand the mechanisms that undergird the American democratic system. It seems reasonable to assume that they will eventually achieve the participation and recognition that thus far has been denied them.

Recognition and participation will be the products of a mutual process in which Muslims seek to build bridges of understanding and co-operation, and in which leaders of other communities reach out to Muslims and learn to appreciate their contributions. Such a process is slow and often difficult, but it is one that other communities have followed in the past, and many Muslim Americans see it as a natural and inevitable in a country based on ideals of freedom and equality. As the American experience slowly moulds the disparate elements of the American Muslim community into a group of citizens fully responsive to those ideals, those same Muslim citizens will themselves increasingly hold their country accountable to their own aspirations for equal status.