

CHAPTER TWELVE

INFANT ISLAM IN THE
LAND OF INFIDELS

THE END OF ARAB ISLAM

While I was watching an Islamic program on television one Sunday afternoon, an official, a young bearded man of Middle Eastern accent, grabbed the microphone at the end of the program and hurriedly declared, "Praised be Allah, Praised be Allah, there are more than one million Muslims in the United States. We are here now to rid the ills of this country . . ." I gasped for air and shouted, "You can't, you can't, you forgot your sword; you forgot your sword."

Arguably, Arab Islam in the Middle East, particularly the Shiite sect in Iran, has been dead for centuries. The fundamentalist 1979 Iranian Revolution is but one example of how desperately Islamic leaders try to inject some kind of life into the decomposed body of their sect. However, the revolution drove the last nail into the coffin. The executioners were no strangers to Islam. They were the guardians of Islam, Khomeini and his like. "Now," says a friend, "there will come a day when an Iranian Muslim has to go into a closet to pray."

Islam will be reborn, a rebirth in the strangest place, not in Mecca, Qum, Karbala, or anywhere in the Middle East, but rather in America. As strange as it may sound, salvation will have to come from "the land of Great Satan," as Khomeini and his successors call the United States. Yes, at places outside of its birthplace.

copyrighted material

The Americanization of Islam is coming from American Muslims. African American Muslims have already spearheaded a “New Islam” or “Reborn Islam.” With their revised, rejuvenated, democratic Islam, African American Muslims will be the saviors of the old, decayed Islam of the Middle East. The Islam of tomorrow is in its infancy in today’s America.

AMERICANIZATION OF ISLAM

The old Islam of submission and superstition was on its last legs when Khomeini, with his nauseating tenets, triggered the last bullet that mercifully put that Shiite Islam to rest. Islam in the Middle East was desperately in need of democracy to guide and shape a new inspiring Islam. America is the place with democracy. Islam in the United States will have no option but to work within the framework of democracy.

Islam in the U.S. began with Black Nationalism that grew out of injustices done by whites and others. Rev. Wallace D. Fard was the founder of “Temple of Islam” in Detroit. Rev. Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975) became his disciple. However, Rev. Fard disappeared in 1934, and Elijah Muhammad took his place and guided people who became known as black Muslims. The Nation of Islam had its share of rough going at the beginning. The black Muslims were torn between religion and politics. Some of their leaders called for separatism, others for revolution. However, they all called for justice for blacks and for the world. While Elijah Muhammad tried to maintain the Nation of Islam as a religious self-help movement, others such as Malcolm X were in favor of a more radical revolutionary approach to social change. Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan became known for their hard talking, which grew out of frustration and oppression.

copyrighted material

The aggressive tone of the Nation of Islam of decades past has given way to a more conciliatory approach. And they have extended an arm of camaraderie to other religions in recent years. "This country is evolving, and we have to evolve, too, and let some of the pain of the past go," Louis Farrakhan has said.

On a Sunday in February 2002 at the Los Angeles Convention Center, Nation of Islam leader Farrakhan played the violin to an audience at a Savior's Day convention of the Nation of Islam.

Among the participants at the Savior's Day convention were Christian clergy and leaders of other denominations. "The Nation of Islam is evolving, just as a thorn-scarred rose grows into a beautiful flower," declared Farrakhan.

The convention offered many significant signs that confirm my claim of a superior Islam on the horizon. After an adjustment period, I envision the American Islam as a global Islamic movement beyond its current leaders.

I could not help but notice a stunning young Muslim woman dressed in all white with a matching hat, sitting in the front row. While others were drawn to her surface beauty, my attention was deeper than that. I saw what only a Muslim from the Middle East could appreciate. She showed that Muslim women do not have to be covered in ugly head-to-toe black chadors and be excluded from public gatherings and confined to the home. She showed that women could have a high place in Islam. Halleluiah . . . American Islam . . . Muhammad, the head of the West Coast chapter of Nation of Islam, calls his wife "Queen."¹

One look at the numbers and it is easy to see a glorious new Islam worthy of celebration, imminent in the horizon. This Islam is "voluntary Islam." It draws Muslims because it is inspiring, joyful, supportive, current, and caring, and as the Koran says, compassionate and merciful. Here is why this Islam will not only survive in America but also serve as a model for global Islam:

copyrighted material

The single most important element in the newborn American Islam is *democracy*. Arab Islam has never been a beacon of democracy. Without that ingredient, American Islam would only be a version of futile Arab Islam of the Middle East. It is not so much the wisdom of American Islam leaders that is shaping the Islam of the future; it is the democracy. While the absence of democracy allows Shiite clergy in Iran to behave tyrannically, American Muslims leaders are born and bred into democracy. This democratic American Islam will replace the decayed and impractical Islam of the Middle East.

The Islam which has been imported into the United States by the Middle Eastern Americans is the same impractical, antiquated Arab Islam that for centuries has been culpable in incapacitating Muslims. Some objectionable practices of Iran's Islamic traditions have already clashed with American culture and were forced to change. The city of Los Angeles, for example, cited an Iranian Muslim for a sacrificial cutting of the throat of a sheep on the sidewalks of Beverly Hills. The old Arab custom of honor-killing does not sit well with American democracy. A case in Los Angeles County Superior Court involves a sixty-five-year-old Syrian immigrant charged with first-degree murder in the death of his nephew for harboring his runaway daughter.²

American Muslims will not want to come out into the streets and carry machetes to beat themselves on the anniversary of Ashura, commemorating Imam Hussein's death at Karbala. Unlike in Iran, an Iranian Muslim woman cannot be banned from entering a stadium here in America; on the contrary, she will be allowed to cheer for her favorite at any sports event. American Islam will not allow a preteen to submit to sexual abuse under any shari'a or other religious law or pretext.

American Islam will be a good Islam. As a good Islam, it will recognize that its survival and well-being depend on the well-being of the world community, and that it cannot achieve its goals unless it recognizes that it is a part of the future of an interdependent world.

copyrighted material

* * *

American Islam realizes that true virtue is to be found in knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and truth.

* * *

American Islam will encourage channels of communication and will not jail, torture, or kill those who seek dialogue.

* * *

American Islam can understand today's problems and does not see earthquakes, floods, and disasters as God's punishment of humankind.

* * *

American Muslim leaders feel love in their hearts for everyone, and compassion and tolerance for other religions.

* * *

American Islam will move from conflict to cooperation. The scripture of American Islam will be devoid of common objectionable passages.

* * *

American Islam will not have superstition or other fraudulent schemes in order to keep its followers.

* * *

American Islam will be an encouraging religion, not a dispiriting government. American Islam leaders do not believe

copyrighted material

that it is necessary to make a hell of this world to enjoy paradise in the next.

* * *

American Islam will not discourage thinking, inventing, and contributing. It will lead Muslims out of a consumer-only state to the state of producer-consumer. It will encourage a spirit of helping yourself, your nation, and the world.

* * *

American Islam will encourage secular higher education and acknowledge and reward individual accomplishments.

* * *

American Islam allows you to choose, debate, object, and change.

American Islam will be a stimulating religion. Inspiration will replace the sword.

American Islam will not limit its scope to hygiene, menstruation, and the proper way to wipe your behind.

American Islam will respect human rights and human dignity in deeds, not only in words.

American Islam will revere women's rights and will not consider a nine-year-old child a woman suitable for procreation.

American Islam cannot have "infallible" leaders incapable of being mistaken in matters of doctrine and dogma. Iran's infallible Khomeini could not have succeeded in the United States. Most Iranians can attest to the fact that the infallibility of Iran's Shiite leaders has incapacitated Iran.

American Islam will have no tolerance for slavery. African American Muslims are the children of slavery, the same slavery that is still practiced in some Muslim countries, and the same slavery that offends all Americans.

copyrighted material

The quest of other religions for more unity will shape American-born Islam. Today, American Islam is moving for more unity, forging ties beyond the black community.

American Islam will have the children born to Middle Eastern Muslim parents play an effective role in shaping a better Islam.

ISLAM REDISCOVERED

On a Friday night at a synagogue in Boca Raton, Florida, one hundred Christians and Muslims joined five hundred members of a Jewish congregation for a service dedicated to peace in the Middle East. A prominent Israeli spoke, followed by a Muslim and a Christian. When it came time to take the Torah from the ark, the rabbi took out three scrolls instead of only one, and, handing one to the Christian and one to the Muslim speaker, invited them to join him in carrying the Torah through the congregation. "The Torah was not given to the Jewish people, it was given to the Jewish people for healing of the world," he explained later. "It is clear to me that Christians and Muslims, just as much as Jews, can be involved in the work of Torah."

"If our faith is to be a source for peace, we must find ways of reconceiving the words and rituals so that they open us to receive one another. Only a vision of this generous and merciful a God reflects the one and same God made known to us through our different traditions."³

During the morning service, Rev. Fred C. Plumer introduced his congregation to the church's newest tenants in a quest for greater understanding of what it means to be "children of one God." The Christians greeted the Muslims with a ripple of applause that grew stronger as it swelled throughout the stark sanctuary under a geodesic dome.⁴

Participating in the Muslim fast of Ramadan, Bishop Tod D. Brown of Orange, California reflected, "I have no

copyrighted material

recollection of a time in our history where we've been asked to fast for our Islamic brothers and sisters. It's very, very symbolic and very, very powerful."⁵

The Islam that is flourishing in America is nurtured by minds that thrive on the ideas of freedom, democracy, and education. "I must be a good Christian and a good Jew before I can be a good Muslim," said a Muslim cleric inviting a Christian priest and a Jewish rabbi to participate in the opening of a mosque in New Jersey.⁶

It is time for the Middle East Muslims, particularly the Shiites of Iran, to face the truth: that Islam imposed limits on diversity of outlook. The uninspiring, immutable, nonenergizing Islam that continues stifling knowledge, that conditions Muslims to have a pessimistic and dampened view of values and expectations in a world changing at an increasingly rapid pace, is dead. The current Middle East Islamic leaders are far from any honest disclosures. Nevertheless, Muslims must have the courage to give a proper burial to the outdated Arab Islam and embrace the realistic newborn American Islam.

The fact is, Islam as a whole is not going to disappear. Instead, the Islam of the future will redefine itself as a personal bond, a relationship of choice, between the individual and God.

Here is an opportunity for Middle Eastern Muslims to join hands with the Nation of Islam. Arguably, Middle Eastern Muslims have no option but to change, to learn, and to assimilate. A study of today's Middle Eastern Islam bears out the need for a swift change.

The 1979 Khomeini Islamic Revolution has forced over four million Iranians to be scattered throughout the world. The majority of them are Muslims who are experiencing their first contact with freedom, democracy, and other religions. Their firsthand experience will be instrumental in shaping the future Islam of Iran, and while the opportunity does not exist in Iran, Iranians outside have an alternative. They have a chance to see the difference between a good religion and a bad one. The long-suffering Iranian American community can alert American

copyrighted material

Muslims of the pitfalls of old Arab Islam. They have a firsthand horror story to tell while learning about the new democratic-born American Islam. Both groups are well qualified through daily experience for their tasks.

U.S. civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) said, "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it."

Pakistan's president Parviz Musharraf declared on a visit to Washington, "We want to curb religious fanaticism, religious extremism, religious intolerance, militancy, anger, and hatred from our society." He also criticized the Muslim world for being backward and weak. "The Muslim *umma* (community) is one-fourth of humanity, but we are the poorest, the most illiterate, the most backward, the unhealthiest, and indeed the most deprived and weakest of the human race."⁶

For centuries, secular-minded Iranians have been crying about the systematic destruction of their civilization, the civilization that was imbued with the sense of individual identity in which men and women asserted rights apart from those of religion. Generations later, Iranians demand that the change be sooner than later.

The Muslims of the Middle East should take solace in the knowledge that the sin of perpetrators in the cloak of Islam is also an opportunity of elation for those who believe that rebirth of a good Islam is possible out of the failure of a bad one.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ *Los Angeles Times*, Friday, September 5, 2003.

² *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 2002, p. A22.

³ *Los Angeles Times*, Tod D. Brown, bishop of Orange California.

⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 2002 p. A4.

⁵ *Los Angeles Times*, September 10, 2000, p. A3.

⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 2000 p. B14 "Three faiths worship under one roof."