

## P R E F A C E

Interest in the growth and development of a range of religious communities in America is currently very high, particularly in those that have their roots in non-Western cultures. The diversity of American culture is increasingly apparent in the wide variety of religious groupings and institutions that are flourishing in this country. Prominent among these is the community of Muslims, which is present on the American scene in a wide range of institutional and cultural manifestations as well as theological perspectives. The recent growth of the Muslim population in the United States and the ongoing efforts to organize religious communities to service members of the faith are drawing the attention of historians of religion, sociologists and others interested in the phenomenon of religion in America.

This volume of essays is not intended to be a comprehensive study of the different Muslim groups in America, but rather a sampling of the range and variety present among immigrants, African Americans and white converts to Islam. The volume is organized into three parts, each illustrating a different way in which community is understood. The first presents material about religious communities organized around specific doctrines or charismatic leadership. Community is thus defined by particularity of theology and practice. Here groups are treated such as the Shi'a, the Sufis, the sectarian movements of Louis Farrakhan and the Five Percenters and the Sunni Dar ul-Islam. The second part attempts to provide a general overview of the variety of groups that are located in a number of the major metropolitan areas of America. The third section provides descriptions of specific ethnic mosques and the way people from different parts of the world are faring in America. Included are such groups as Albanians, Turks, Pakistanis, Yemenis, Iranians, Lebanese, and African Americans. Community for these groups becomes equated with a mosque or center characterized by one particular ethnic or national identity.

As Muslims settled in various parts of the country they began to establish permanent businesses such as small groceries, coffee houses, and restaurants. Some stayed for the explicit purpose of working in American factories and plants, like those employed by the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan, and in the ship-building industry in Quincy, Massachusetts. Not surprisingly they looked to each other for comradeship in the context of American culture. They began to organize themselves for social interchange and for the maintenance of a sense of ethnic identity, enjoying cultural events such as folk dancing, religious festivals, and rites of passage rooted in the Middle East. For some, an important dimension of this attempt to maintain their identity came through corporate meetings to observe some of the basic elements of the Islamic faith. Even though this early generation of immigrants for the most part had not been mosque attenders in the Middle East and often were religiously illiterate, they nonetheless found in the common acknowledgment of their Islamic identity in America a bond for social cohesion.

Muslims who wanted to come together for religious observance in the early part of the century often found themselves at a loss for trained leadership. They looked to the few educated members of their communities for guidance, and many times had to rely on the volunteer services of persons untrained in the Islamic sciences to act as teachers or leaders of the prayer. In time even some of those who initially were uninterested in participating in any Islamic activities found their ideas changing as they settled, started families, and began to be concerned for the religious education of their children.

Soon the interest in providing a context for the observance and perpetuation of Islam became serious enough that a number of communities began to consider the importance of establishing a mosque in their area. To a significant degree this movement toward "institutionalization" also represented an attempt to legitimate their religion in the American context, particularly to Jews and Christians who locate themselves in churches and synagogues, as well as to form institutions parallel to those of their sister religious communities. They were able to incorporate some American practices within what they called a mosque setting. It was not that they were deliberately "Westernizing" the religion of Islam or creating a context of emancipation for its attendees, but that they had no

models with which to work except what was already available in this culture. The construction of buildings to serve as mosques or Islamic centers began in the 1920s and 1930s; by 1952 there were over twenty mosques that joined in the formation of the Federation of Islamic Associations of America.

At the same time, during the early part of the century, that immigrants were finding ways in which to affirm their identity, a number of African Americans began to be attracted to one or more of the sectarian or separatist groups in this country claiming an identification with the religion of Islam. Moving from the cotton fields of the South to the ghettos of the North, they were motivated primarily by reasons of economics (many groups that claimed some kind of Muslim identity maintained platforms of economic advancement for blacks); of justice (reacting to continuing racism in America they found the egalitarian teachings of Islam particularly attractive); of identity and rootedness in a history, culture, and people from which they had been severed by the experience of slavery; and of rejection of Christianity, which they believed not only had provided the ideological justification for their enslavement but centered on the worship of Jesus depicted as a blue-eyed, fair-haired Caucasian man.

Movements such as the Moorish American Science Temple of Noble Drew Ali and the Nation of Islam of Elijah Muhammad provided Americans of African descent the means for affirmation of black identity and advancement in the face of white oppression under a loose rubric of what were claimed to be Islamically oriented beliefs and practices. From these movements grew a range of other African American groups professing affiliation with Islam, some sectarian such as the Ansaar Allah and the Five Percenters, and others Sunni groups such as the Dar ul-Islam, the Islamic Party of North America, the Islamic Brotherhood, Inc., and the Hanafi Movement. The relationship of these groups to communities of immigrant Muslims has been minimal, although more recently increased efforts have been made at conversation and cooperation. After 1975 Warith Deen gradually changed the sectarian, racist, and separatist teachings of his father Elijah Muhammad in the Nation of Islam to parallel the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Sunni Muslims. Relations have been cordial between the followers of Warith Deen and Sunni Muslims, although full integration has not yet been realized.

After the middle of this century there were significant changes in the numbers of immigrant Muslims coming to America as well as in the circumstances under which they emigrated. Those arriving in the 1950s and 1960s from the Middle East were primarily committed to Arab socialism and nationalism and were basically secular in orientation. The organizations that they formed here tended to emphasize Arab culture and the politics of the Middle East rather than the religion of Islam. With the changes in immigration laws that altered the quota system and allowed for the admission of immigrants from Asia during the administration of President Lyndon Johnson, the situation changed dramatically. Qualified people came from many areas of the world, especially Southeast Asia, contributing heavily to what has become known as the brain drain in that area.

With the influx of this new group of educated and professionally oriented immigrant Muslims, and with the availability of funds from Arab states interested in the growth of Islam in America, a second wave of mosque building flourished in the 1970s, which has continued to the present and shows every sign of increasing despite the cessation of overseas support. Muslims seek an outward and visible symbol of their faith such as that provided in the structure of the mosque, which is both a formal context for worship and a center for the communal gathering of its members. A variety of issues are involved in building a mosque. What are the appropriate functions of the building? How should it be financed if borrowing from a bank involves the Islamically prohibited paying of interest? What is appropriate dress for men and women when attending the mosque? How can the administration of the mosque be organized so as to accommodate different racial and ethnic communities and their distinctive cultural preferences? These and other issues are addressed in the essays that follow. Despite these concerns both the construction of Islamic buildings and the formation of new organizations has continued apace; by 1992 there were over 2300 Islamic institutions in North America including mosques, schools, community centers, publishing houses, and media programming units.

Because early immigrants to this country had very limited skills in English and because of the chain migration that followed bringing members of ethnic groups to be with their compatriots in America, the early mosque communities tended to be ethnically

oriented—Arab, Albanian, Tartar Russian, Turkish, Circasian, Yugoslav, and many others. With changes in the immigration laws of the 1960s, new immigrants have been coming from many more places in the world, representing much more diversity. This has further complicated the difficult task of finding some way in which to determine a basis of unity and Islamic identity in an already very diverse American Muslim community.

In the latter half of this century several factors have been influential in determining the character of Muslim life in America. In the 1960s there was a significant influx of Muslim students committed to the new Islamist ideologies of Egypt and Pakistan. These students had a significant impact on the “Islamization” of Muslim communities. Representing organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and the Jamaati Islami of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, they brought with them a very different concept of community than had developed among the immigrants in America, namely, the idea of the *umma* as articulated by Sayyid Qutb and Mawlana Mawdudi.<sup>1</sup> With a prescriptive definition of what community means, they were often shocked and dismayed by what they found happening in mosques and Muslim groups in this country. In addition, and probably more important, their ideology was a reaction not only to what they saw going on in the American scene but also to what was taking place across the Islamic world as a result of the “modernization” (liberalization, secularization, Westernization) of Muslim society. They therefore set about trying to experiment in forming idealistic communities, at times attempting to impose their response to Western influences in Islamic countries on Muslims in America.

Local communities here, on the one hand, were eager to learn from these educated and Islamically articulate students. On the other hand, they found that some of the things being told to them, at times forced upon them, were too extreme for their liking and unnecessary or even counterproductive in the American context. These tensions have continued both between student and local groups, and between some of the more recent immigrants who are advocates of the conservative Islamist ideology and those who have been longer in this country and are more comfortable with the general acculturation that has taken place.

Another reality that has impinged on the lives of American Muslims has been the interest of oil-rich countries as well as

wealthy Muslim individuals in the welfare of Muslims living as minorities in various areas of the world. This has resulted in the donation of considerable funds for the construction of mosques and Islamic centers in this country since the early 1970s, inevitably bringing the influence of the donors to bear on the thinking and directions taken by the recipients.

A number of factors come to play in the decision of some Islamic groups to forego the ideal of an integrated community in favor of continuing, or establishing anew, what are clearly ethnic mosques or centers. One obviously is numbers. When the group is small and living in proximity it is necessary to find ways in which to worship together without distinctions. When there are enough Arabs or Pakistanis or Slavs or whatever, one has a critical mass representing a specific language and cultural group. Another factor is generational. When there is a kind of chain migration with the parents and relatives of Muslims already in this country coming without facility in English, there is a strong demand for a unit in which they can feel comfortable speaking their own tongue and enjoying their own customs. It is also the case that there are clear cultural and even theological differences among groups from different parts of the world; many of these play themselves out especially in the ways in which holidays are celebrated as well as in consideration of appropriate functions of the mosque. Issues such as whether or not a man should wear a hat during prayer or whether women can be elected to mosque executive committees have inevitable consequences for the sense of unity among ethnically diverse peoples.

The tensions that exist around acculturation continue to engage Muslims in America. What is the heritage that is going to be passed on to the children? Are they going to be taught to live as Muslims in an alien society, or are they going to be integrated as Americans who happen to be Muslim? These and other issues to be examined in this book come to bear on decisions whether to put the ideal unity of Islam above sectarian or ethnic differences or whether to acknowledge that Islam is made up of different peoples, groups, and ideologies that must be allowed to maintain their individuality.

The relationship of immigrant and African American Muslims continues to be a significant issue in this country. Over the course of this century Muslims from overseas have made a few notable

efforts to reach African Americans. The Ahmadiyya missionary movement of Pakistan has actively recruited Americans of African descent into its fold since the early 1900s. W. D. Fard, whose exact ethnic identity remains unknown (he was probably either Turkish or Iranian), served as the inspiration for the beginning of the Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammad. A number of articles in this volume reflect the initial as well as the continuing impact of the ideology of the Nation of Islam on African American Muslim groups. More recently the Pakistan-based Tableeghi Jamaat has had extensive operations in some urban areas of America.

The African American Muslim community for its part has proved to be influential in several ways on the immigrant Muslims. African Americans have challenged immigrants both to be stricter in their observance of Islamic laws and practices, such as abstinence from alcohol and pork products, and to abide by the Islamic ideal of genuine racial equality. Many times African Americans initially have been attracted to Islam because of that ideal and then deeply disappointed that it is not always realized. African Americans also have insisted on adopting and keeping Islamic names. Students coming from overseas in the 1960s expressed their horror that many immigrant Muslims had chosen to anglicize their names or simply discard them for something more American sounding. African Americans, on the other hand, have been diligent in their insistence that to be Muslim means to accept the identity that comes with a new name, that to be American does not mean one has to look and sound like members of the Judeo-Christian majority.

In some cases immigrants have exhibited great curiosity about African American Muslims, particularly in the ghetto areas of the cities. In places such as Rochester and Los Angeles that has taken the form of concrete efforts to reach out to the African American community. Rarely are African American and immigrant communities integrated, although several mosques in this country serve both groups. On the whole, however, there has been and continues to be minimal social contact between immigrants and African American Muslims, even for worship or sharing in holidays and celebrations. As Christine Kolars remarks in relation to the two groups in the Hudson Valley of New York, on the one hand, first- and second-generation immigrants are struggling with what it means to be American; on the other hand, African Americans are

adjusting to a new identity as first- or second-generation Muslims. Many of the latter continue to wonder if the inclusiveness of Islam really means that their immigrant sisters and brothers welcome them into the fold. They question why some of the immigrants seem to be less concerned with matters of dress and other outward symbols of Islamic identification than they feel themselves to be, at the same time that they resent being excluded from community participation for reasons of not knowing Arabic or not having access to culturally defined practices. Many immigrant Muslims, on the other hand, question whether some of the African American groups, especially sectarian movements or the Nation of Islam under Farrakhan, are Islamic at all. Several of the studies in this volume point to the resentment African Americans feel if they are not recognized by immigrants as "real" Muslims or when they perceive immigrant organizations such as the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) to be dictating to them while restricting their participation.

One of the issues that has faced immigrant Muslims in America is that of relating as a community of orthodoxy, however that might be defined, to groups that claim Islamic identity but have developed in ways that depart from what is understood as the essence of that orthodoxy and in some cases make little reference to Islam except to use certain Islamic terminology. In some African American groups, for example the Nation of Islam and the Five Percenters, racism is an acknowledged part of their doctrine. This is difficult for Muslims who believe in the egalitarian principles of Islam to accept. Some of these African American groups are dealing with problems and issues that are different from the concerns of immigrants. Indigenous Muslims are often driven to formulate their ideologies to address the socioeconomic problems that they have experienced in America, while those with ties overseas may be more interested in international political concerns and developments in places like Palestine, Kashmir, Bosnia, and the like. African American sectarian movements often emphasize their distinctiveness as defined over against American culture as part of their long-standing efforts to achieve parity in a country that has consistently relegated them to second-class status. Immigrant communities, on the other hand, tend to stress the similarities between the dominant teachings of Islam and those of Christianity and Judaism. Generally eager to be accepted as full citizens, they try to



acknowledge those elements of their faith that underscore commonality and help open doors to full participation in American society.

It is clear from this study of different Muslim communities in America that the goal of an Islamic unity, regardless of the strength of that ideology, is subject to enormous strains. Most students of religion, and especially sociologists, acknowledge that culture is indeed a component of religion. For many communities in this country the primary concern today is how not to compromise the ideal of unity in Islam while still maintaining some degree of ethnic identity and cultural affiliation. They struggle with ways in which to create an Islamic culture that is not necessarily "local", that is, determined by the cultural trappings of any particular geographical area of the world (Arab, Pakistani, Iranian, or whatever). "The extraordinary ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity of Muslims in Los Angeles," says Ron Kelley by way of example, "poses critical challenges to the desired model of dedicated communal unity." The task as some see it is to allow for a culturally pluralistic Islam that is not at the same time an ideologically pluralistic Islam. In general Muslims agree on ideological issues, with the exception in some cases of the Shi'a. But Islam is primarily a religion of orthopraxy, in which minor differences of practice have developed along cultural lines in different geographic areas according to the teachings of the four schools of law. Some Muslims in America are raising the question of what a deculturalized Islam might actually be, and whether or not it is a goal important enough to warrant the sacrifice of different ethnic and cultural interpretations.

Concerns over matters of acculturation, then, are among the most commonly raised in the studies represented in this volume. How does a second- and third-generation Muslim community that has adapted in significant ways to American culture respond to the challenges offered by the presence of newer immigrants representing a more conservative ideology or by the addition of an Islamically trained and often more legalistic Imam? The lack of an American-raised, American-oriented Muslim leadership, necessitating the use of untrained lay leaders, has led some to feel that it is essential to bring to this country more Imams trained overseas. The tensions between a leadership that affirms an Islam incubated in a different country and the growing community that has adjusted to American realities can be severe.

Some of the Imams from overseas are financed by and thus accountable to foreign countries and tend to preach according to those interests. Muslim communities in America often find it difficult to express to foreign Imams that they are American Muslims with a special understanding of Islam that is different from that fostered by Saudi Arabia or other Islamic countries. This brings to the forefront the issue of having to choose between conformity to a single interpretation of Islam, that which some would want to say is Arab Islam, or acknowledging and honoring the pluralism that indeed seems to be a reality in this country. If it is the latter that is most highly valued, to what extent is that an impediment to the cohesion of the Muslim community? The difficulties some overseas Imams have understanding the real issues and problems of American Muslims are raised in a number of the essays to follow.

One of the problem areas in community building identified by several of these authors is the reality of class and economic differences. To a certain extent this pertains among the immigrants themselves. A substantial number of the earlier immigrants tended to be from rural areas, less well-educated and economically less well-off than is generally the case with the more recent immigrants who are often highly educated and occupy high-level professional positions. Economic and class distinctions are even more obvious between immigrants and African Americans, which in some cases serves to underscore the frustration of blacks who look to Islam as an answer to the continuing experience of economic (as well as social) marginalization that they experience in the American context.

The matter of Sunni-Shi'i relations is the focus of a number of essays, as well as the role that Shi'is sometimes see themselves to be playing as a "minority within a minority," as Abdulaziz Sachedina describes it. Only fairly recently have Shi'i communities experienced a sense of their own separate identity in the context of Islam in America as well as an awareness on the part of the American public of their distinctiveness, primarily because of events in Iran and Lebanon. This, of course, is painful insofar as they become identified in the American mind with extremism and violence. One of the interesting recent developments within the Shi'i community is the increase in the numbers of African Americans who are converting to Shi'i Islam and joining these communities, to which several authors in this volume make reference.

Living in America has brought many changes to immigrant groups. Some of those changes occur through the involvement of women in the community. In the Middle East women seldom even attend the mosque, let alone take a prominent role in its activities. Although their emergence as involved participants in mosque organizations in this country varies according to country of origin, in some cases it has been real and crucial for the formation and maintenance of the organization. In some communities they function much as women have functioned for generations in Christian churches, preparing bake sales, running bazaars, and holding luncheons and dinners. Like their Christian sisters, however, some are also venturing into roles of leadership within the mosque organizations and are active in forming groups specifically for Muslim women. Others on university campuses are contributing to the effort of helping non-Muslim Americans better understand the religion of Islam. Still others are involved in providing Islamic education for the young or debating issues of dress for women.

A number of other themes emerge in the studies presented here, among them the attempts made by a number of Muslim leaders to initiate and foster interfaith communication and dialogue; the relation of Sufi communities to other Islamic groups in America; political differences determined by ideologies, events, and sources of funding coming from other parts of the Islamic world; and the strains of trying to keep Muslim youth involved in the community and responsive to its values and of providing a context in which the elderly can feel wanted in the American environment that tends to foster loneliness, depression and alienation. Virtually all of these studies underscore the fact that one of the significant motivating factors in the communities under consideration is the necessity of understanding their identity and role within American society and culture in the context of a long-standing and continuing atmosphere of prejudice and misunderstanding. From such obvious things as continuing government surveillance of the Nation of Islam and Arab Americans, and the recent verbal and physical assaults on mosques and groups as a result of international events, to the more subtle but continuing "micro-moments of racism" experienced in their daily lives, Muslims see evidence of the realities that face them as they struggle to live as persons of faith and integrity in what is an alien and often hostile environment.

Muslims in America are increasingly aware of the fact that they

are in the business of building community. Originally they were content simply to find other Muslims with whom to share the concerns they had about being Muslim in the American context. Those associations have served to provide a haven against the hostility they often experienced. But they have come to realize that the fact that people have in common an identity as Muslim does not automatically ensure community. The current effort to determine what, if anything, binds Muslims together in a whole may be unique to this country and is an experiment that is multifaceted. The key to understanding how to come to terms with it is in the recognition that diversity runs in a number of different directions. There is diversity between the recently arrived and the third- and fourth-generation immigrants, between immigrants and American-born Muslims, between rural and urban people, between members of the working and the professional classes. There are differences between student communities and those who have decided to settle permanently in America. This is seen especially when the children of those who have settled grow older and their focus is more specifically on America whereas that of the students and recent immigrants is still on overseas concerns. And of course there are the vast cultural differences already noted among those who come from a variety of different countries and areas of the world.

Given all of these distinctions how are Muslims today organizing to create community and underscore the things they do hold in common? One way is through a strong emphasis on maintaining Islamic values and ideals through the educational system, both in Sunday schools and in day schools. Many Muslims feel that they should organize and even build their own schools so that their children can be Islamically educated as well as protected from the influences and possible dangers of American society. Even when there is consensus on the importance of such schools, however, it is often difficult to achieve agreement as to what constitutes an appropriate Islamic education. In many cases it is African American rather than immigrant Muslims who opt for parochial school education for their children.

Other ways are also underscored as opportunities for creating Islamic community. Considerable literature is being developed in the English language that supports a de-ethnicized Islam with a universal creed and base. Annual conventions are held to provide a special sense of participation in a large group sharing ideas and

experiences. This kind of group experience has proved to be empowering in the sense of communal identity with its emphasis on unity despite the variety of individual participants. Many areas are making special efforts to hold common meals and celebrations around Islamic holidays to try to replicate the sense of community experienced in countries where there is little ethnic diversity. Sharing a common meal brings a feeling of participating in an extended family within the context of American society. This is seen as particularly important for Muslim children as they experience their own sense of belonging to a community clearly defined by its Islamic identity.

In general the new mosque and center communities have attempted to reconstitute themselves into self-consciously more Islamic and less ethnically stylized organizations. That such an effort can be made is due to the fact that more recent immigrants to this country are educated in English and can communicate with Muslims from other areas. (There are, of course, significant exceptions to this, such as the Yemenis and Shi'ite Lebanese in Dearborn, Michigan, discussed later.) These attempts at more pluralistic Islamic centers also have reflected the ideology that became dominant in the 1970s and 1980s in which the bond of the brotherhood of Islam is seen to transcend all racial, ethnic and color differences. That this idea of a pluralistic rather than an ethnic mosque community is a major challenge, however, will be well illustrated in the articles to follow.

It is perhaps inevitable that Muslim communities in America to some degree will adapt, accommodate, and acculturate to the realities of existence in the American context. What seems evident from the studies in this volume is that Muslims are, in fact, both understanding of the need for this kind of adaptation and creative in finding ways in which to make it happen while still remaining true to their understanding of what it means to be Muslim. As Sheila McDonough writes of the Muslims in Montreal, "There seems every reason to suppose that the vitality the Muslim people of this city exhibit and express will give birth to new forms of Muslim existence in this distinctive setting." That the Muslim presence in America is real, vibrant, and growing is now quite apparent. How that presence is acknowledged by the rest of America's citizens will undoubtedly color the ways in which Muslims themselves understand their role as members of American society

as well as of the larger community of Islam. The extent to which the racial-ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic distinctions that exist within and among the Muslim communities in this country will be seen either as divisive in the task of identifying an overall unity or healthy, natural, and creative to the life of the whole will be the agenda for the ongoing deliberations of Muslims as they continue to forge their identity in the American context.

#### NOTE

1. The idea that there is an Islamic identity that is the central bond for the *umma* or community has been a major theme in the development of Islamic revivalism. The late Ismail Al-Faruqi was prominent in the call of the Islamic Society of North America for an emphasis on what he termed the *ummatic* ideal. Revivalist Muslims today are calling for a community that transcends language and geographical units in the common bond of belief.