

THE COLORED MUSLIMS

OF

PITTSBURGH

By

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Social Sciences, Bombay, India)**

**Submitted to the School of Social Work of the
University of Pittsburgh in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work**

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

1948

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Whether he serves them through case work, group work or inter-group work, the social worker has to have an understanding of the individuals in their total cultural settings. The knowledge of the individuals' cultural settings is essential in helping them with their problems of interpersonal relationships--such as parent-child relations, marital difficulties and community relations.

Religion is one of the important components of the total cultural setting. It is essentially dynamic, personal and interpersonal because it wields a considerable influence over the attitudes of the individuals toward various aspects of life. Thus, religion is a determining factor in community relations. Any religious belief or practice, however sensible or erratic in itself, is accepted on personal terms and is put to personal use. A religious belief or practice may also be the result of indoctrination. It could also be an indicator of the kind of adjustment an individual or a community is making to the life situation. The social worker has to understand religion in relation to the way in which it serves in the process of adjustment in the environment. He has to grasp the significance and meaning of religion to the individuals whom he helps to make their own normal adjustments.

The purpose of this study is to provide the social workers in Pittsburgh with some understanding of one of the

religions to which some of their Negro clients belong, namely, the Islamic religion. As Ira De A. Ried points out,

"Extremely significant in Negro life, however, has been the inordinate rise of religious cults and sects. ... Today Father Divine, Daddy Grace, Moslem sects, congregation of Black Jews and the Coptic Church, have been added to the church organizations existing among Negroes. Their influence and reach are enormous and significant."¹

Day by day the Moslem sect seems to be expanding in number, and this is borne out by the fact that in Pittsburgh alone there exist three different Moslem denominations. This religion, one of the more recent in the United States, has most of its adherents in the large cities like New York, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Columbus (Ohio), etc.

The writer found that there is a lack of information among social workers concerning the essential elements of beliefs and customs of the Moslem group. This group, although classified among "the churches in protest," demonstrates something unique in making a serious attempt to seek to identify its members with that which it considers to be originally their very own in the past. As Ira Brown points out, perhaps no other race was so completely severed from its past as was the Negro from Africa. Negroes on the whole are indifferent regarding their past and no doubt they could not be otherwise since the school books are for the most part silent about it.² The Moslem group feels that Negroes are American by chance and circumstances and

1. Ried, Ira De A., In A Minor Key; p. 84-85

2. Brown, Ira C., Story of American Negro; New York: Friendship Press

they were stripped purposely of their original culture, language and religion by the white.

Recently the Moslem group has come to the attention of social work agencies in Pittsburgh due to certain problems arising out of its religious practices. This study was undertaken to learn more about the group and its thinking.

Method

The interview method was employed in collecting the data for this study. Most of the interviews were taken in group situations at the Mosques (Muslim Churches.) From the nature of the participation in group interviews, the writer feels that a fair cross section of opinion was obtained by this method. The number of individuals in the group interviews varied from three to twenty-seven. One of the group interviews was taken at the First Islam Mosque at Cleveland, Ohio.

Later, individual interviews were also held especially with the priests and the leaders of different Mosques. A questionnaire was prepared which the writer used as a guide in conducting the interviews.

The writer is conscious of the limitations of this study. At times the interviewees were reluctant to enter deeper into the discussion of some questions which were of a highly subjective nature. But some of those very questions brought forth spontaneous responses which were found to be vitally significant. The statements of interviewees which were found to have common elements in them were utilized in writing the fourth chapter of this study.

CHAPTER II

RELIGION IN NEGRO LIFE

Religion has played a vital role in human history. It has covered a vast area of human interest and activities. From the earliest stages of history, man has looked for an all-powerful Sustainer, who can create, save or destroy, who can give or withhold what one may need or desire. This Sustainer has been assigned an ultimate power and control over human destiny. Religion is the systematized effort of man to cooperate with this Sustainer in realization of certain values--religious values.

Values stem from the needs and interest of man. Whatever satisfies a need or an interest has a value. Being inextricably related to the needs and interests, the values become personal. In every case a value belongs to the one for whom it has meaning. A religious value is important and significant to the one who cherishes it. Therefore religion moves into the realm of personality.

Throughout the history, religion has assumed the role of helping man with the exigencies of his struggle for existence. Perhaps the Sanskrit word "Dharma," meaning religion, quite significantly expresses this role because the word "Dharma" originally meant "that which stabilizes." Since man has seen religion as a cure-all for the ills of the world, whenever handicapped in his struggle for existence, he has fallen back upon religion as a way of adjusting to these handicaps. With

this in mind, it is important to ask, what is there in the history of the Negro that predisposes him to religion.

It is commonly believed that the Negro is religious by temperament. The existence of numerous churches, storefronts and cults among the Negro people has been attributed to their racial temperament. There is no doubt that the church has played a significant part in the life of American Negroes, today and in the past. However, an examination of the history of minority groups in similar situations of social stress, stigma and discrimination as the Negro, reveals that there is something more beyond this so-called instinctive religiosity.

Dr. Abraham A. Sachar in his "History of the Jews" significantly points out how relentless persecution of the Jews in Western Europe during the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries predisposed them to the cults and Messiahs who claimed to be "sent by God to usher in a new world in which the Jewish suffering would cease." This testimony goes to indicate that the religious cults and "incomprehending loyalties to rites and dogmas" became important at the time when other avenues of social and cultural enlightenment and progress were closed for the Jews.¹

In "Myth of the Negro Past," Herskovitz, the anthropologist, states, "underlying the life of the American Negro is a deep religious bent," and to substantiate this statement he says "tenability of this position is apparent when it is

1. Sachar, Abraham A., A History of the Jews; New York: A. A. Knopf, 1930, p. 240

considered how in an age marked by skepticism, the Negro has held fast to belief." From such a statement only one inference can be drawn and that is that there is almost an instinctive drive towards the religion in the American Negro which is quite compulsive.

Mays and Nicholson, in their revealing study, point out that during the days of slavery

"It became necessary for the Negro to work out for himself a technique of survival ... possibly the most significant technique of survival developed during the days of slavery might well be called 'religious' technique which is represented by the Negro Spirituals and by the early efforts to establish and develop the Negro church."¹

In the early emancipation period the church played a significant role in the Negro society and strengthened the caste barriers.

We can not study Negro society without a reference to the American caste system. From a sociological point of view the caste could be defined as an endogamous status grouping, which places culturally defined limits upon the individual member in terms of mobility and the kinds of social interaction. The caste determines the relations in which the people stand to one another in society. We clearly see that the caste is a social class where privileges and obligations are hereditary, where the line of class separation is drawn on the basis of difference in descent.

The age-old caste system of India originally was the classification of the society on a vocational basis. So the

1. Mays & Nicholson, The Negro's Church; p. 2

occupations, duties and privileges were hereditary and each caste was to some extent a trade guild, which used to train its members from childhood in its specific vocation. In ancient India as well as to a considerable extent even today in the Indian villages, the caste Panchayat, the assembly of five respected caste members, act as a court of arbitration, and at times serve as trade unions. Today the occupation and obligation are no longer hereditary. The castes can change their vocation and a member of a particular caste can rise or fall in social scale. However, the line of separation drawn on the basis of descent and endogamy is widely practiced.

The American caste system emerged with the end of slavery in the United States. "It has replaced slavery as a means of maintaining the essence of old status order."¹ The American caste is pinned to biological features, to color, features, hair, etc. The badge of the caste is categorical regardless of the social value of the individual. According to Dollard there are two castes in the United States, the white and the colored, each occupying respective superior and inferior rank. The American caste has emerged into the social consciousness to the extent that the customs and the laws attempt permanent separation of one caste from another.

A brief discussion of the effects of this operating social order on the Negro caste seems necessary at this point in order to understand the so-called religiosity of the American Negro.

1. Dollard, John, Caste and Class in a Southern Town; New Haven: Published for The Institute of Human Relations by Yale University Press

Since the American caste system emerged as a substitute to slavery, to maintain the old status order, it provided an automatic barrier against the social contacts of the Negro, thus restricting his social, cultural and economic progress. Enactment of some of the restrictive laws and their partial enforcement promoted further social isolation of the Negro. The Jim crow attitude of the white caste blocks his free social movements. Social and economic discrimination hampers the growth and development of the Negro to his maximum capacity.

In the social phase of life, his opportunities for self-expression in civic affairs are limited. In the political field, his scope of activity and expression is almost next to nothing. In the South he is cut off from the body politic because he is disfranchised to a large extent by the poll tax. In private business concerns his opportunities for employment are limited. He can not put his knowledge and skill to use to the fullest extent. Certain educational opportunities are denied to him.

Such artificial limits to the free functioning of the Negro in political, civic and economic life, made the Negro go in search of the field which would give him an opportunity to exercise his powers and capacity, unrestricted self-expression and an opportunity for gaining status, recognition and taking leadership. Finding no opportunity elsewhere the Negro turned to the church.

What the Church Has to Offer

Various illustrations in Dr. Woodson's "History of the Negro Church" show that freedom in religious life had an early beginning in Negro history. Quite early, through his own merit and capacity to preach, and sympathetic encouragement from white people since the church on the whole remained accommodating and passive, the Negro achieved freedom in his church life, though highly restricted in other fields. Thus the freedom of worship was relatively the earliest gain of the Negro, while the freedom in other avenues of life was still denied to him. Mays and Nicholson consider this as one of the basic reasons for numerical growth of the Negro church. The Emancipation Proclamation signed by Lincoln in 1863 did not remove the crippling barriers from the Negro's social, economic and political life. The doors to enlightenment and social progress were comparatively late in opening for him. As a natural reaction against these restrictions, the church assumed a larger importance in the Negro life. The church was the only institution which could be called his own, which could compensate for his drab and otherwise uninteresting life. Thus the church has been and continues to be expressive of more than simple religious need. It has become a centre for community life. The following statement vividly describes how the church meets a variety of needs:

"It is a social center, it is a club, it is an arena for the exercise of one's own capacities and powers, a world in which one may achieve self-realization and preferment. ... Aside from any spiritual benefit derived,

going to the church means being dressed in one's best clothes, forgetting for the time about work, having the chance to acquaint oneself with credit before other fellows and having an opportunity of meeting, talking and laughing with friends. ...⁴¹

The ministry was once a chief outlet for Negro ambition. Even today a poorly educated individual with a strong desire for leadership does not find it difficult to start a new church. Four laymen and three ordained ministers can start a new church, among the Baptists. In many cases even this loose regulation is not observed. One can see the Hill District of Pittsburgh dotted with small churches, many of them "store fronts," organized by uneducated ministers. The prerequisite for being a minister is not education but a "call to preach." Denominational rivalry and scrambling for positions of leadership and splits within a church have also made their contribution to the multiplication of Negro churches. Such a situation provides for political life within the realm of churches and denominations. They become the Negro's Democratic and Republican Conventions, his Senate and House of Representatives. Collections and disbursement of funds for the maintenance of the church set a stage for activities, raise debates and issues to be settled. A janitor can become an important member of the managing committee of a store-front church, a young waitress with a little talent for singing could be the leader of the choir, a middle aged housewife from a lower economic class could become the treasurer of the church funds.

Thus the church satisfies a variety of needs and offers

1. Johnson, James Weldon, Black Manhattan; A. A. Knopf, 1930, p. 165-166

opportunity for self-expression. The individual may take his choice. Collective ceremonies with emotional singing of spirituals and other-worldly sermons provide a medium of release for emotional tensions and lend a sort of rhythm to otherwise hard, hardsram existence. People feel at home and can relax in the congenial environment where self-expression is possible without restraint. There is also a scope for gaining status, recognition and a sense of self-worth through participation in an organized group life.

CHAPTER III

MOSLEM DENOMINATIONS - THEIR HISTORY,
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Background

Almost all the religions of the world are known after their revealers, Buddhism after Buddha, Christianity after Christ, Zoroastrianism after Zoroaster, etc., but the followers of the prophet Mohammed object to their religion being called Mohammedanism because of the belief that this religion is the divine system ordained by God which he revealed to the prophet Mohammed through the angel Gabriel. This religion is known as "Islam," meaning complete submission to the will of God. The follower of this faith is a Moslem and according to the Koran, the holy book of the Moslems, God gave that name. In the oriental countries the adherents to this faith are known as Moslems and the faith is known as Islam. So, according to the Moslem, the word "Mohammedanism" is a misnomer because Mohammed was a messenger who brought the message of God to mankind.

Before delving into the history of the three Moslem denominations in Pittsburgh and the shades of difference in their religious philosophy, beliefs and practices, it is necessary to have a general idea of Islam as a religion and what some of its principal beliefs are.

As stated above, the word Islam means submission to God. Islam, however, is more than a spiritual philosophy. It lays down definite laws which encompass the social, economic

and political life of man. The tenets of religion proscribe in detail the way of life for its adherents. The Koran, the holy book, lays down the rules for human conduct such as the relationship of man and woman, the institution of marriage, laws for divorce, inheritance and division of wealth, debts, contracts, the administration of justice, taking care of the poor, widows and orphans. The Koran repudiates speculation, bans loaning money at interest, puts an absolute veto on intoxicants and pork, music and the making of human images. It stresses the equality of man and repudiates slavery (though enslaving of the vanquished aggressor is permitted. He can earn his freedom under certain conditions.) Thus Islam signifies the cultural whole.

There are five obligatory duties of Islam:

1. Ritual prayers: The prayer is said five times a day facing in the direction of Mecca.
2. Fasting: From the dawn to the sunset during the month of Ramzan. Complete abstinence from food, drink, perfume and tobacco is proscribed.
3. Zakat or Tax: It is sort of a church or poor tax, supposed to be levied once a year and its proceeds to be used for certain charitable purposes.
4. Hajj or Pilgrimage to Mecca if the means and circumstances permit.
5. Jehād or Holy War, in a general sense, against the Unbeliever. However, the first Jehād is against one's own "lower" self. The second Jehād is propagation of religion

through wordy warfare and the third Jehād is the armed crusade in defense of Islam.

The Moslem Groups in Pittsburgh

Moorish Science Temple of America

This cult was founded by Timothy Drew, alias Noble Drew Ali, a Negro from North Carolina, on the belief that the salvation of the Negro race lay in going back to their spiritual origin. He believed that the people originally brought from Africa as slaves were from Morocco and were Moslem by faith. However, it should be borne in mind that Drew Ali's American Moslems have a conception of Islam uniquely their own and this concept has been questioned and energetically denounced by the Moslems who are the followers of the prophet Mohammed. "The Holy Koran" of the Moorish Science Temple "divinely" prepared by Noble Drew Ali bears no resemblance to the Koran of Moslems written centuries ago. However, Drew Ali claims to be the prophet "who was to bring the true and divine creed of Islam ... who was prepared and sent to this earth by Allah, to teach the old time religion and the everlasting gospel to the son of men."¹ (3:XLVIII)

The holy book of "Moorish" Americans consists of sixty-four pages. It is held in high esteem by the Moors and is not shown to outsiders. The writer was able to secure a copy

1. The Holy Koran of Moorish Science Temple of America, p. 59

from a non-Moorish Moslem for perusal. The book is written somewhat on a biblical pattern. The book is based on unheard of hypotheses such as life and work of Jesus in India among the Moslems,¹ his friendship with Lamas,² his work in Egypt and Persia. Then follows the chapters of instructions and warnings for all young men, duties of man and wife, parents and children, admonitions of charity, justice, gratitude, sincerity, etc., and prophetic reference to the role of dark races in the world.

"The key of civilization was and is in the hands of the Asiatic Nations."³

"Therefore we are returning the church and Christianity back to the European Nations, as it was prepared by their forefathers for their earthly salvation. While we, the Moorish Americans, are returning to Islam, which was founded by our forefathers for our earthly and divine salvation. ... Come all ye Asiatic of America and hear the truth about your nationality and birthrights, because you are not Negroes. Learn of your forefathers' ancient and divine creed. That you will learn to love instead of hate."⁴

In Chapter XLVII the prophet goes on to say:

"Through sin and disobedience every nation has suffered slavery due to the fact that they honored not the creed and principles of their forefathers. That is why the nationality of the Moore was taken away from them in 1774 and the word 'Negro,' black and colored, was given to the Asiatics of America who were of Moorish descent, because

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1. The Holy Koran of Moorish Science Temple of America, p. 11
 2. Ibid, p. 12
 3. Ibid (2:XLV) p. 50
 4. Ibid, Ch. XLVIII, p. 59-60

they honored not the principles of their mother and father, and strayed after the God of Europe of whom they knew nothing."

Thus according to the Drew Ali, the Negroes are Asiatic, Moorish Americans and their religion is Islam and Christianity is the religion of the white man (the European.)¹ Each must worship God under the banner of his own religion.

Beliefs and Practices

Intense race consciousness is revealed in the following beliefs of this group:

Before you can have a God, you must have a nationality. "So-called" Negroes are Asiatics or Moorish Americans. Noble Drew Ali is the prophet of the Moorish people, who is sent by God for the salvation of Asia and America.

He is a kindred spirit of Confucius, Buddha, Jesus and Zoroaster. He gave a nation to his people.

There is no Negro race. By calling him Negro or colored the white man has stripped the Moor of his honor, power, religion and every other worthwhile possession. The name means everything.

"We, as a clean and pure nation descended from the inhabitants of Africa, do not desire to amalgamate or marry into the families of the pale skinned nations of Europe."

(Drew Ali)²

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1. It is interesting to note that the writer saw a picture of Jesus with Negroid features and dark skin, painted by a Moorish who explained, "Jesus was not a white man. He was an Asiatic, you know."
 2. The Holy Koran of Moorish Science Temple of America, p. 17

The group does not believe in the priestly institution. According to Drew Ali, "When man sees Allah as one with him, as Father Allah, he needs no middleman, no priest to intercede." Nor do the Moors believe in offering the sacrifice of animals as other Moslems do.

The writer had no opportunity to witness the religious service of this group. He was told by two of its members that there no longer exists a temple in Pittsburgh. According to Fausett this group is reluctant to allow outsiders in the temple.¹ The writer was told by a member that there are adherents of this faith in seventeen states of this country. The following information was available so far as the religious practice is concerned:

There is no baptism.

Members must pray five times a day facing the East in the direction of Mecca. Like other Moslems they do not prostrate while praying.

Friday is the Sabbath day.

The members wear a badge with an encircled figure seven.

Common words of greeting are "Peace" and "Islam."

Indulgence in European games, movies, social dancing and lusty music is forbidden.

Radicalism and "immoral reforms" are absolutely vetoed.

1. Fausett, Arthur Huff, Black Gods of the Metropolis; Philadelphia: Anthropological Society, Vol. III, University of Pennsylvania, 1944

Marriages are strictly monogamous. Divorce is rarely permitted.

Use of any kind of meat and even eggs is forbidden. So are intoxicants and smoking.

Men must keep beards.

Men must support their families, wives must obey husbands, and care for their children.

The Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam

The movement was launched by Mirza Gulam Ahmad of Punjab, India, in 1889, who claimed to be the Messiah promised in the Holy Koran.¹ The adherents of this cult believe that there are two types of prophets, the prophets who are law-bearers and the prophets who come from time to time to interpret the law and to do away with the corruptions that creep into the religion in the course of time. The adherents of this cult are known as the Ahmadis and believe that their messiah is the "Promised Messiah" whose advent was foretold in the Bible and scriptures of other religions.

The followers of Ahmad insist on being called "Ahmadi Moslems" in order to distinguish them from other Moslem congregations like the Moorish Science Temple and the First Islam Mosque. They claim that they are "true and real" Moslems because of their belief in Ahmad, the promised Messiah of all nations and religions.

1. Here the word Koran signifies the holy book which contained the teachings of Prophet Mohammed

The cult was founded sixty years ago and claims to have its missions in India, England, Australia, Palestine, the Argentine and West Africa. In 1921 the first mission of the Ahmadiyya cult was started in Chicago by Dr. M. M. Sadiqu. In 1928 the Moslem League was started by Dr. Khan in Pittsburgh which later joined the Ahmadiyya group. Both Dr. Sadiqu and Dr. Khan came from India. At present the movement is guided and governed by the headquarters in Chicago. There are five Ahmadi missionaries in the United States at the present time. A quarterly journal "Moslem Sunrise" is published in Chicago.

The membership of the group in the Pittsburgh area is mostly drawn from the Hill district, Duquesne and Braddock. Every member contributes one tenth of his monthly income as tithe. Half the amount goes towards the local congregational work while the other half goes to the headquarters for the international work of the cult.

The cult owns its own Mosque which is located on Webster Avenue in the Hill District. The ground floor is used for Nizams (prayers,) religious classes and business meetings. There is a simple altar from which the priest gives his sermons. A carpet is spread on the floor during the prayer for the devotees to kneel and prostrate on. The walls are bare of any pictures as Islam forbids the drawing of human images. The priest lives on the upper floor of the building. His salary is paid directly from India.

Beliefs and Practices

Ahmadis accept the Koran as the unchangeable word of God, which lays down definite laws for day to day life of its believers.

Islam respects all the predecessors of the prophet Mohammed because they all brought messages from God for different people. Moses was the first law-giver and Jesus did not bring any new message, but he came to restore the law of Moses. In support of this belief they quote Jesus, "Think not that I came to destroy but to fulfill." (Matt: V:17)¹ Religions of other prophets were not for humanity as a whole and as a result they are controversial while the Koran is undisputed. "Mohammed represents the completion of the missions of all the prophets from the earliest dawn of history. ... He was appointed to collect all mankind under the banner of one religion."²

The Koran is the last revelation of God to mankind and there will be no further revelations. However, according to the prophecy of the Koran, from among the followers of Mohammed will come the illuminator. Hazrat Ahmad of India is the last illuminator. His followers are the only "true Moslems," others are unbelievers.

Islam is a universal religion. Any one can be converted to it, white or colored.

Islam enhances the status of the colored people.

1. Ahmadiyyat or True Islam, p. 27

2. Safi M. R. Bengali

There are many common elements in the practices of the Moorish Science Temple and the Ahmadiyya Movement. Among the common practices are: Men and women are segregated during the prayer. Women stand behind men. Men cover their heads with the fezz caps, women wear the Indian sari in a rather awkward way, which covers the ankles of the feet as well as the head. The sari is adapted because Islam instructs women to cover their bodies thoroughly. Purdah or the veil may come gradually among the American Ahmadi women. They are admonished to keep their eyes downcast.

Women are prohibited from putting on "exhibitionist" dress or use cosmetics, which are "devices to tempt the men." Anything that awakens lower passions must be avoided. Social dancing, dating, movies and music, alcoholic drinks and even the shaking of hands with a member of the opposite sex is strictly forbidden because "they lead to immorality." Parents are responsible for the morals of the children and should "cut out the roots of evil" from the beginning.

An Ahmadi Moslem marries only an Ahmadi Moslem. The Koran forbids giving the daughters to unbelievers. It is objectionable to marry a non-Ahmadi Moslem.

Parents arrange the marriages. The boy and the girl are consulted before the final arrangement.

Divorce is permissible as a last resort.

Pork and unkoshered meat is forbidden. The Arabic word "Khinsir," (the pig) means "very foul" and the use of its

meat produces shamelessness.¹

Friday is the day of Jinnah (Sabbath) and prayers must be offered between 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. Except that it is a day of work like any other day of the week. An Ahmadi must pray five times a day.

First Islam Mosque

A Palestinian Arab, Mr. Jalajal, who owns a small grocery store in the downtown area of Pittsburgh, became interested in converting the Americans to Islam. He refuted and challenged the claim of Ahmad as the promised messiah and declared that the claims of Ahmad and Noble Drew Ali were pre-tentious. He preached the gospel of the Koran as the last word and that there will be no more prophets or messiahs after the prophet Mohammed. He was able to gather together some of the disillusioned Ahmadis and the First Islam Mosque was established in 1941. The Mosque got its charter from the government in 1942. Mr. Jalajal offers his services without any remuneration. He conducts the mass prayers as well as teaches the Arabic language and conducts religious classes.

The group owns its own building of the mosque on Wiley Avenue. At the end of Jinnah prayer on Friday, a tray is circulated for the collection of dues for the upkeep of the organization. There is a council of nine persons elected by

1. The Teachings of Islam, By Promised Messiah, Published by Anjuman-K.-Tarraqqi - Islam, Deccan, India, p. 27

the vote of "financing" membership, whose term of office is for one year. There are thirty financing members at the present time.

Beliefs and Practices

There is not much difference between the beliefs and practices of this group and the Ahmadiyya Movement except that the First Islam Mosque people believe there is no other prophet or messiah for the Moslems except prophet Mohammed. The Koran is the final word of God.

Men and women are allowed to dance separately but on the whole dancing is looked upon with disfavour. Shaking hands with the opposite sex is forbidden.

Marriages are strictly within the group.

Islam teaches its adherents to obey the law of the land and it is the duty of a Moslem to comply with the laws of the state.

Common Elements in the Beliefs and Practices of the Three Denominations

The three denominations believe that there is no "Negro race." One can be either an oriental or occidental. Negro is the name given by the white man as a means of discrimination against people with dark skins.

Islam was the original religion of the slaves brought from Africa.

Nationality makes a world of difference. Before you can have nationality you must have your religion and a name indicating your nationality. Islam gives name, nationality and religion.

Islam is the last and the greatest of all religions. God says, "This day I have perfected for you a religion and completed my favour on you and chosen Islam as your religion." (5:3)¹

Praying five times a day is obligatory.

Marriages are within the group itself.

Indulgence in intoxicants, smoking, eating pork and unkoshered meat, attendance at movies, dancing and gambling are prohibited.

Friday is the Juma (Sabbath) day.

Fasting in the month of Ramzan.

1. An-Noor (The Light); The Meekabian Press, 7605 Woodland Avenue, Cleveland (Ohio), p. 6

Instruction in Arabic Language

The Ahmadiyya and the First Islam Mosque emphasize the learning of the Arabic language, primarily because the Koran is written in Arabic. Regular weekly classes are conducted to instruct the members in Arabic. Half of the time is spent in memorizing passages from the Koran and the rest is devoted to the learning of the language. Homework is assigned for each week and the minister chastises in a mild tone those who lag behind in the assignment. The learning of the language is often punctuated with a word or two regarding the importance of the Arabic language to the Moslems "as a Nation."

Vali Akram, the American-Moslem Priest of the First Cleveland Mosque, in a pamphlet appealing to the convert to "learn to speak Arabic - the language of Africa and the East," advances the following six reasons:

1. "It is a heritage of your ancestors and leads towards Nationalism."
2. "The bond of common language is one of the greatest factors towards the unification of any race or Nation."
3. "It would be unification through education, which is most essential for security."
4. "As a unifying force, it would be the key to the door of progress, leading towards conversation, efficiency and economy."
5. "It would develop those qualities hidden within, you knowing nothing about."

6. "It would create new life hidden from you which would affect your unborn generation."¹

It is clear that inspite of some controversies in the field of philosophy, these three groups have much in common so far as their beliefs and practices are concerned.

1. Akram, Wali A., A Simplified Course of Spoken Arabic,
First Cleveland Mosque, Cleveland, Ohio

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Race Consciousness Among Negroes

Like national consciousness, race consciousness is a collective sentiment in which race becomes an object of loyalty and idealization. Race consciousness is built upon the pattern similar to national consciousness, namely, on the tendency to seek the roots in the past and establish one's race as a significant historic group; to be aware of the present and to strive for a better future. This tends to glorify the past and create a feeling of pride and identification.

However, race consciousness among the Negroes seems to have developed on different lines. The Negroes' reaction to discrimination seems to be a potent factor in their being race conscious. The Negroes' past in the United States is by no means such that it would tend to draw inspiration or pride. Moreover, the Negro, unlike the American white, doesn't have an identifiable culture or traditions from the old world. Whatever he might have brought from Africa three centuries back has been for the most part submerged and virtually eliminated from his life as a result of thorough acculturation and Americanization. Whatever he has today of language, habits, attitudes, and ideas and ideals are American, not African. The only common factor to all Negroes is color, a biological feature. It is but natural that the emphasis put on color by the

dominant American group, the white, has made the Negro acquire a color attitude. One finds an evidence of the color line in the Negro society.¹ Thus, the Negro race consciousness is built upon the color factor and especially the color discrimination which is most vital in the development of race consciousness in the Negro, since it affects all strata of Negro society and stimulates a feeling of race identification in the Negro race as a whole.

Not being satisfied with the past in America, certain groups among the Negroes have looked to Africa and its ancient civilization as a source of inspiration. The impression left on the mind of the Negro masses by the Garvey Movement deserves a brief word.

"Concretely, the movement set in motion what was to become the most compelling force in Negro life -- race and color consciousness, which is today that ephemeral thing that inspires 'race loyalty,' the banner to which Negroes rally; the chain that binds them together. It has propelled many a political and social movement and stimulated racial internationalism. It is indeed a philosophy, an ethical standard by which most things are measured and interpreted. It accounts for much constructive belligerency today."²

Three religious groups known as the Mason groups are obviously marked by race consciousness. They place a great deal of emphasis on their racial identity and separateness from Christianity. This is most expressively revealed in the "Holy Koran" of the Moorish Science Temple of America.

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1. Dollard, John, Caste and Class in a Southern Town
 2. Roi, Ottley, New World A-Coming; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, p. 81

"We Are Not Negroes"

In all the interviews, the rejection of the word "Negro" came out quite forcefully. The following selected testimonies given by the members of different Moslem groups bear out the preceding statement:

A member of the Moorish Science Temple asked the writer at the very beginning of the interview, "When you go back to India, what would you tell your people about my race? Who am I, according to you?" The writer said, "Would you like to tell me who you are?" The answer, "We are the descendants of the Moabites of Africa. We are Moorish Americans; not Negroes as white men call us."

Another adherent of the same cult said, "The word Negro is the badge of slavery. I refuse to be called a slave. My African civilization is the oldest of all. The white man knows that and yet calls us Negro."

An Ahmadi Moslem remarked, "Negro is a purely American word. It is a word of contempt."

At the First Islam Mosque, a middle-aged woman said, "There is nothing like Negro. Negro is no nation. To be free you must have your nationality. Islam brings you into nationhood and you are no longer a Negro or inferior to any one in the world."

In these statements, the very rejection of the word Negro is expressive of the sensitive race consciousness of these people which they attempt to overcome by eliminating the painful and humiliating past through rejection of the word Negro. Their religious conversion symbolizes their desire to resign from the Negro race and thus dissociate themselves from

all the connotations that accompany the word Negro. Islam offers the best medium of crossing the race lines since it declares all men as brothers. The sermons in the Mosques do their part in promoting the idea that in Islam there are no social barriers and Islam abolishes privileges on the basis of ancestry, wealth or color. The story of Hazrat Bilal, a Negro saint, is quite appealing to the minds of the converts.

In spite of theoretical differences among these people the slogan adopted by one of them in its earlier days in 1927 has become a sort of doctrine of all three groups because it somehow fits into their frame of mind. The slogan has really a strong psychological appeal: "Get your religion, get your nationality, learn your language, change your name and you shall not remain a Negro." The following testimonies are quite revealing:

1. "Our forefathers were Moslems. I believe that the colored folks of this country should go back to their original religion."
2. "I am seeking my liberation. You know what I mean."
3. "God does not change your fate unless you change your condition. I tell them, accept Islam and you won't be insulted or called a Negro."
4. "Islam changes your nationality and puts you in the international brotherhood of all Moslems."

Criticism of Christianity

Some of the interviewees claimed that their religious conversion took place after a lot of study and soul searching. This set of individuals were critical of Christianity as it is practiced today.

A young man vehemently said, "Christianity discriminates. It preaches one thing and practices another thing. A colored man cannot go to the church of the white man."

An Ahmadi said, "They say Christ died to save the world. I ask them why there is so much sin and misery in the world if Christ died for our salvation. They can't answer me back. No, sir, they can't."

Other such criticisms were leveled against the ideas of the Trinity and man's original sin. They see a sort of hierarchy in the concept of the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Ghost - which seems to be putting one another on different levels of relationship. Islamic monotheism - One and the only God - is more appealing to them. The original sin idea seems to this group as paying for the sins which they themselves never committed. They test the doctrine of atonement of sin by the realities of life and come to the conclusion that the salvation of man cannot depend upon the blood of Jesus, and man himself has to work out his own salvation.

There is a marked tendency to identify Christianity with the white or "European" race. It is also accentuated by the awareness that the slaves were not allowed to gather together for worship lest they do something else than mere worship.

A steel mill worker said, "The white man gave us his religion to keep us in slavery. I gave him back his religion." His fellow religionist said, "He (the white man) gave us Christianity so that we would obey and work for him."

Compensatory Beliefs and Satisfactions

This group from the lower economic and social strata, finding itself deprived of many things in life, derives a great deal of satisfaction from certain compensatory beliefs.

The most commonly held belief is that of gaining status through religious conversion, adopting Arabic names and speaking an uncommon language. The converts believe that the Islamic religion brings about better acceptance from the white people.

An elderly man said, "When the white man comes to know that you are a Moslem, he respects you." Two young men told the writer with a chuckle that they were often taken as Asiatics due to their Arabic names. The change of name might have spared them discrimination at one time or another. The priest does his part by emphasizing the value of an Arabic name and tongue as a means of escape from the color discrimination. "If you have a Moslem name, if you wear a fess cap and speak our language among yourselves, nobody in the South would challenge you." In support of this statement, the minister went on to narrate the experiment of a Negro priest of New York who found no discrimination when he concealed his

racial identity by donning a foreign headwear and speaking with a foreign accent.

The changed name and the new religion lends an element of curiosity. It helps him to get himself distinguished from others. Many Negroes do not know anything about Islam and this helps the converts to give an elaborate exposé of their religion and its philosophy and prove their intellectual superiority over others. Discussing the Palestine partition they identify themselves with the Arab cause. This enhances that feeling of superiority that comes with considering oneself a part of a large, internationally known group of people.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, all three sects look with disfavor upon the middle class pleasures, which they term "degrading" or "immoral." Prohibition against dancing, dating, playing cards, movies and such other means of relaxation and recreation has given in some measure a superiority complex and the feeling that, "I am holier than others." One can easily see why the adherents of these three groups, who are not only in a racial minority and despised because of their background as slaves but also kept at a distance by the educated upper class of their own race, find necessary compensation and are enabled to achieve some satisfaction by being different from others, especially the Negroes of their own class. A construction worker significantly expresses this feeling: "I am not like other fellows who eat anything. We Moslems never touch pork or wine. I never eat at those joints on the Hill, never go to a movie or a bar. No, sir, not me!"

As mentioned in the very beginning of this study, any religious belief or practice, however sensible or erratic in itself, is accepted on personal terms and is put to personal use. This chapter attempts to show what compensations and satisfactions as well as escape mechanisms are provided by some of the beliefs and practices of the people who call themselves Moslems. The Social Worker needs to be aware of what this newly adopted religion means to the converts. With such an awareness will come the sympathetic understanding that is necessary in helping the clients who come from these religious bodies.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapters have shown that there are three religious groups which call themselves Moslems. However, the Moorish Science Temple differs entirely from the other two groups so far as the scriptures are concerned. The other two groups, Ahmadiyya Movement and First Islam Mosque, inspite of their other differences, have the same scripture and the same religious philosophy and practice. Each group thinks that it is the only "true and real" Moslem group. There is an acute awareness of kinship and a very strong in-group feeling within each of them.

In the second chapter, it was observed that the church has played an important part in Negro life. It is more than a religious institution, meeting a variety of needs. The church and its religious activities are of special importance to the Negroes who are in a lower strata of social and economic life.

From the testimonies of the various members of the three groups, it becomes clear that the Moslem sects appeal to those Negroes who feel left behind in American life. The sects offer assurance that by becoming Moslem and adopting Arabic names one no longer remains a Negro, one becomes a better individual, "inferior to none."

Belonging to these groups also provides certain compensatory beliefs and satisfactions. The converts have

achieved a feeling of status by believing that to profess to the Islamic religion is to take a step higher; in other words, to get closer to the "moral life" as well as to dissociate oneself from the Negro race. Together with this feeling, there is also international identification with the Moslem world. Another compensatory belief is that to become a Moslem brings about better acceptance from the white Americans.

APPENDIX

I. Doctrine and Belief

- A) What is the belief of your religion concerning the following:
- i) Life after death
 - ii) Atonement of sin
 - iii) Koran - the book given by God
- B) What are the sacred rites of the Islam?
- C) What are special religious days? What is their significance?
- D) What are some of the religious prohibitions? (E.g. food, mode of behavior, etc.)
- E) What language is used in prayer?
- F) Do you see any difference in the doctrines of Christianity and Islam?
- G) What do you think of other faiths?

II. Organisation of the Mosques

- A) In what way does your group differ from others?
- B) History of the sect in general, in the United States, date of foundation in Pittsburgh
- C) Membership, what occupations are represented, total number of adults, young adults and children
- D) From what section of the city do your members come?
- E) How is the Mosque maintained?
- i) Dues

- ii) Tithing
- iii) Collection
- iv) Funds from foreign countries (India, Arabia, Turkey, etc.)

- F) Are there any American priests?
- G) Where do the priests receive their religious training?
- H) Church building, capacity, other facilities

III. Social Attitudes

What are your attitudes in regard to the following?

- A) Family group (parent-child relationship)
- B) Position of woman in family and society, her rights and obligations
- C) "Purdah" or "veil"
- D) Marriage and divorce
- E) Can you marry outside of the Islamic group?
- F) What are some of the religious injunctions that you feel an Islamic should practice in daily life?
- G) Recreation, music, dancing, co-educational activities

IV. Personal Attitudes

- A) What is your race? When did you embrace Islam?
- B) What particular aspect of the Islamic doctrine attracted you to Islam?

- C) What is your personal feeling about Christianity?
- D) Do you feel that your practice of Islam is hindered by
 - i) Occupation
 - ii) School
 - iii) Any particular pattern of American culture
- E) What is the attitude of your non-Islamic relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors and community in general towards your religion and its practices?
- F) In what way can the Islamic faith best help the world today?

V. Community Life

- A) Besides religious ceremonies what are the other activities undertaken by the Mosque? Celebration of festivals, social functions, etc.
- B) Do you participate in any community activity?

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