

What's in a name? - The Problem with the "Nation of Islam" (part 1 of 2)



The Fundamentals of Islamic Belief

One could be forgiven for assuming that any group with the word Islam in its title would be Muslim. But when it comes to the group calling itself the "Nation of Islam", one must be very wary indeed. To be Muslim means to hold certain fundamental theological beliefs. The Muslim profession of faith is:

"I bear witness that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Mohammed is a prophet of God."

To elaborate on these statements, to be a Muslim means to believe that God is One, unique. He has no partners, no associates, no Son, nor did He ever become incarnate. As chapter 112 of the Quran makes clear:

"He is God, the only One,
God the Everlasting.
He did not beget and is not begotten,
And none is His equal."

In Islam the ascribing of partners to God, referred to as shirk, is the greatest of all sins. The Quran states explicitly in chapter 4, verse 36:

"Serve God, and join not any partners with Him."

Secondly, Muslims believe Mohammed to have been the "Seal" or last of the prophets. To recognize anyone after Mohammed claiming to be a prophet, negates one's Islam. As is stated in the Quran:

"O people! Mohammed has no sons among ye men, but verily, he is the Messenger of God and the last in the line of Prophets. And God is aware of everything." (Quran 33:40)

This is reinforced by various sayings of Prophet Mohammed, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him:

“The tribe of Israel was guided by prophets. When a prophet passed away, another succeeded him. But no prophet will come after me; only caliphs will succeed me.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

“In My Ummah, there shall be born Thirty Grand Liars (Dajjals), each of whom will claim to be a prophet, But I am the Last Prophet; there is No Prophet after Me.” (*Abu Dawood, At-Tirmidhi*)

The Errant Theology of the “Nation of Islam”

The “Nation of Islam” does not adhere to these core tenets of Islamic theology. They believe that God appeared on earth in the person of their founder, a “great man from the East”, Master W. Fard Muhammad, a preacher who first came to public attention in the USA on July 4, 1930 then mysteriously “departed the scene” on February 26, 1934. As the NOI website unambiguously declares:

“WE BELIEVE that Allah (God) appeared in the Person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July, 1930; the long-awaited “Messiah” of the Christians and the “Mahdi” of the Muslims.”

In 1934 following the unexplained departure of the “Master”, the organization he founded came to be headed by one Elijah Poole, who became known as the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Until very recently, the “Nation of Islam” accorded the status of prophet to Elijah Muhammad.

Therefore it is clear that despite their name and calling themselves Muslims, “Nation of Islam” beliefs about God and prophethood are glaringly incompatible with Islam.

Louis Farrakhan, current leader of the Nation of Islam, finally allowed to enter the UK after a court orders the lifting of a 15-year government ban.

“Honorable” Elijah Muhammad, the “prophet” of the Nation of Islam.

“Master” W. Fard Muhammad in whose person God appeared in early 1930’s America, according to Nation of Islam beliefs.

Racist ideology also at odds with universal Islam

A third area of non-compliance with Islam, and the one which receives by far the greatest attention in the secular media, is the issue of race. The present “Nation of Islam” leader, Louis Farrakhan, is on record as having made objectionable anti-Jewish (as distinct from anti-Zionist) remarks. Among other unfortunate utterances, he is alleged to have referred to Judaism as a “gutter religion”.

Moreover, the NOI is a segregationalist organization exclusively for black people descended from slaves. Proper Islam is a universal religion open to people of every race. Muslims are supposed to differentiate between people on the basis, not of ethnic origin, but of piety and upright behavior. As the Quran makes clear:

“And mankind is naught but a single nation.” (Quran 2:213)

“O Mankind! Most certainly, it is We (God almighty) who have Created you all from a single (pair) of a male and a female, And it is We who have made you into nations and tribes, that ye may recognize each other. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you.” (Quran 49:13)

And in his final sermon, Prophet Mohammed made clear that racism has no place in Islam:

“O people! Verily your Lord is one and your father is one. All of you belong to one ancestry of Adam and Adam was created out of clay. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab and for a non-Arab over an Arab; nor for white over the black nor for the black over the white except in piety. Verily the noblest among you is he who is the most pious.”

In contrast, the NOI has a pronounced anti-white bias. They refer to blacks as God’s chosen people and Caucasians as white devils. They call for a separate homeland for American blacks, for racially segregated education and for a ban on interracial marriage. To quote again from their website:

We believe we are the people of God’s choice.

WE BELIEVE this is the time in history for the separation of the so-called Negroes and the so-called white Americans.

We want our people in America whose parents or grandparents were descendants from slaves, to be allowed to establish a separate state or territory of their own--either on this continent or elsewhere.

We want all black children educated, taught and trained by their own teachers.

We believe that intermarriage or race mixing should be prohibited.

(part 2 of 2)

Fellow Muslims with eyes the bluest of blue and skin the whitest of white...

Former NOI members who recognized anti-white racism as folly and converted to proper Islam include Malcolm X and the world champion heavyweight boxer, Muhammad Ali. Both spoke out on the subject:

“[The Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca] was an exhilarating experience to see people belonging to different colors, races and nationalities, kings, heads of states and ordinary men from very poor countries all clad in two simple white sheets praying to God without any sense of either pride or inferiority. It was a practical manifestation of the concept of equality in Islam.” (Muhammed Ali)

“During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug) -- while praying to the same God -- with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and in the actions and in the deeds of the ‘white’ Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan and Ghana.”

“We were truly all the same -- because their belief in the one God had removed the ‘white’ from their minds, the ‘white’ from their behavior, and the ‘white’ from their attitude.”

“This religion recognizes all men as brothers. It accepts all human beings as equals before God, and as equal members in the Human Family of Mankind. I totally reject Elijah Muhammad’s racist philosophy, which he has labeled ‘Islam’ only to fool and misuse gullible people as he fooled and misused me. But I blame only myself, and no one else for the fool that I was, and the harm that my evangelical foolishness on his behalf has done to others.” (Malcolm X)

Whither the “Nation of Islam”?

Laudable as the lifestyle espoused by the NOI may be, one cannot escape the fact that despite some of the trappings of Islam, the theology and ideology they currently espouse are not only non-Islamic but actually anathema to Islam. There are, however, some signs that things may be changing for the better.

On the death of Elijah Mohammed in 1976 his son Wallace D. Muhammad (now known as Imam Warrithuddin Mohammed) assumed NOI leadership, renamed the organization the Muslim American Society and tried to steer it toward Islamic orthodoxy. After three years a disgruntled Louis Farrakhan broke away and re-founded the NOI in line with the teachings of Elijah

Mohammed. But in February this year, Farrakhan, recovering from a serious battle with prostate cancer which may have given him cause to reflect, shared a platform with Wallace and made an important move toward mainstream Islam by declaring:

“Allah sent Mohammed with the final revelation to the world. ... There is no prophet after the Prophet Mohammed, and no book after the Koran.”

Let us hope that similarly orthodox statements on the nature of God and on race will also soon be forthcoming. Let us look forward to the day when Louis Farrakhan and his NOI follow the example of their former colleague, Malcolm X, who eventually found his way from the so-called “Nation of Islam” to genuine Islam and stated:

“I declare emphatically that I am no longer in Elijah Muhammad’s ‘strait jacket’, and I don’t intend to replace his with one woven by someone else. I am a Muslim in the most orthodox sense; my religion is Islam as it is believed in and practiced by the Muslims in the Holy City of Mecca.” Alhamdulillah.