The Witness

Volume 79 • Number 5 • May 1996

American faces of Islam

In the church's interest

JUST A NOTE TO COMMEND YOU on the magnificent job on the March issue. Focused, substantive, exemplary. To wit, any chance you could send a bundle so I could pass them out as I move around the country to speak. I'd like to get this issue around as it directly addresses things I regularly think about (sabbath economics).

Ched Myers
Los Angeles, CA

Come Spirit come

WE THANK YOU for the copies of the June issue of *The Witness*. America must be very far away, as this delivery has taken well over six months to get here. Thank you for the cheque. I can assure you it will come into good use.

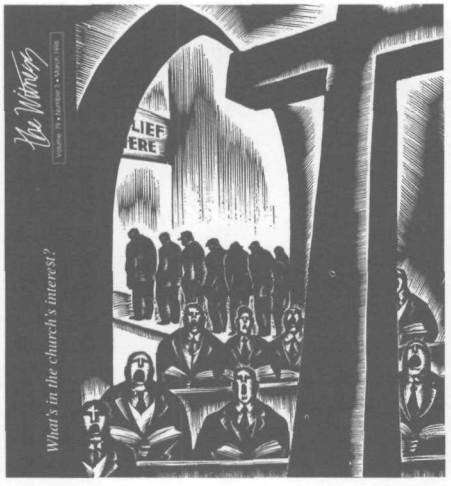
You have been singularly fortunate to have got me to speak at all. Being very private, I avoid the media like the plague, and often show some awkwardness of deportment.

We are struggling to develop a culture of human rights in this country. Botswana has been fortunate not to have the common experience of many African countries in this regard. Nonetheless, vigilance is called for. A Human Rights Centre has been established. It is a fledgling organization, acting as a watchdog at the same time, educating people about their rights. Recently we were visited by the Secretary General of Amnesty International.

Mercifully, the institution of Ombudsman is about to be established. An act of Parliament is on the statute book. Recently I attended a conference in Swakopmund, Namibia, where these public protectors from various neighbouring countries attended, to explore further means and ways of strengthening the notion of a fair deal for all, and good governance of the citizens.

Khotso Makhulu
Archbishop, Central Africa

Letters



Witness praise

I READ OF *THE WITNESS* IN THE *UTNE Reader* [1/96]. It sounds thought-provoking and stimulating. As a lifelong member of the Episcopal Church, I was proud of the boldness of perspective that this publication sounds like it speaks from. I look forward to my first copy.

Kim Moreno
San Diego, CA

THIS LETTER IS PROMPTED by my receiving the complimentary copy of your March 1995 issue [on Sin]. It is an excellent journal in every way. I am very happy to read that you still consider The Witness a "left-wing voice in the church."

On the subject of theology or community I have had a diverse experience. First of all as an Episcopal clergy person I have given countless confirmation instructions at both levels, youth and adult. However, in recent years my experiences have led me to examine more closely and radically many orthodox opinions and thus to find that I am no longer as absolute as I once was concerning some beliefs.

I was forced to express these changes after one of my better students at Ursinus College asked me to review with him a number of beliefs he no longer held to be essential; he asked as well whether he should continue on a course which would lead to ordination. His list of doubts included many tough calls — for instance, the Trinity, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the ascension, eternal damnation and the denial of salvation to non-Christian religious people. We took up his doubts one by one and I was hard put to mount a philosophical defense for any of them. He asked, "Then must I take it all on faith?" My only response was another question, "Did Jesus demand such a promise of his disciples?" Actually, Jesus never mentioned most of the beliefs my student questioner named, and the resurrection and ascension, acts ascribed to Christ with little explanation, are capable of varied interpretation. Explanation was left for later believers to put forward; thus some doctrines were delayed for several centuries. The essential Christian belief is in Jesus himself and his simple command, "Follow me." And I told my student of Bishop James Pike's compelling slogan, "more belief, fewer beliefs." Such an answer may not satisfy the absolutist, orthodox theologian, but it will certainly maintain a healthy community of seekers and disciples, as very few are turned away because of rigid orthodoxy.

William B. Williamson
Professor of Philosophy Emeritus
Ursinus College
Collegeville, PA

TODAY I RECEIVED A SAMPLE COPY of your magazine.

One of my earliest memories is of walking home from school (in a small town in Illinois in the 50s). I was about 6 or 7. The cement was wet from the rain, a shiny grey; the orange leaves against the grey, on the brilliant spring green grass. I was at the Episcopal Church front lawn, enjoying the air, the rain. I glanced to my right and saw the glass-fronted sermon box "Jesus Is Your Comforter." I thought of my satin maroon down comforter I slept under. It seems that my thinking of Jesus is a combination of this memory and a song I learned as a child at my aunt's Missouri Methodist church, "Jesus Loves Me..." and the picture of Jesus with the sheep on my Aunt's farm.

Name withheld
Fallbrook, CA

Free food — and poetry

IN OUR CITY we have a non-denominational organization of volunteers who feed

the homeless. The practice of this group is to set up a table of donated food each day at a site adjacent to San Francisco City Hall.

My little boy was four when he came home from seeing Food Not Bombs distribute free food for the first time. He recited the enclosed poem to me at that time and I wrote it down.

Susan Word
San Francisco, CA

First Poem

— by Derek Word Raskin, age 4

I saw a lot
of food
next to silly hall
and the homeless people
ate it all.

Visiting Bosnia

I WENT TO BOSNIA FOR 10 DAYS in January, joining my son, Philip Smucker, a freelance journalist. I wanted to see what the Episcopal Church was doing in Bosnia.

Philip and I spent two days with Church World Service (CWS) in Metkovic. CWS is the operating arm of the Protestant churches in places like Bosnia, and receives monies from the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief.

CWS thought it had a contract with the State Department Bureau of Population, Migration and Refugees to purchase 12,00 pairs of shoes for children and senior citizens north of Sarajevo, but at the end of January this project had not yet been funded. CWS is also beginning its efforts toward economic redevelopment, such as assisting with loans to rebuild industry and farm livestock herds.

I also visited many agencies providing humanitarian services in Sarajevo. The work they do is unbelievable. With help from Jesuit priests in Austria, UNICEF is refurbishing the water system of the city. The International Rescue Committee has been working to reestablish gas lines. (Gas is now on every other day in Philip's apartment.)

On the day I visited the Red Cross, Sophie Ann Bonefeld explained that she had been tied up with press releases describing the demonstration by Muslim women in Tuzla who were demanding to know where their husbands, sons and lovers were. Everyone knows that their bodies are in mass graves.

Driving from Sarajevo to Tuzla, I saw nothing but shelled-out houses for 30 miles. I went through the square where 75 young people were killed last May 25.

Philip and I traveled to Bihac through the French and British zones. In the French zone just north of Sarajevo, a sniper had been killed because he had killed a civilian just two days before. We were told emphatically not to get off the road for any reason because of land and anti-personnel mines. We went by Mrkonjic Grad, a completely burned-out city into which Serbs were being relocated the next day. From the heights of the hill we could see shells of buildings and very few roofs. What were these people moving back to?

At a lunch with CWS and International Rescue Committee workers, I was assured that any humanitarian aid would be very worthwhile. Through prayer, and through the largesse of our government and the world — in particular, for us, through the Presiding Bishops' Fund for World Relief — we can help rebuild a country that should never have been torn apart in the first place.

John Smucker
Alexandria, VA

Ida May Sydnor video

I appreciate your interest in the work of Ida May Sydnor, a Philadelphia folk artist who is a founding member of the Southwest Community Enrichment Center's (SCEC) community art center (see June 1994).

Nearly 75 years old, she was born in Baltimore and raised an orphan. She spent 15 years in Byberry, a local mental institution, eventually left and was cared for by an older sister. Since 1990, Ida May has cultivated her innate, artistic talent and has become a prolific painter using cloth, canvas, paper materials and magic markers for her tools. Her work expresses her philosophy on life and reflects her child and adult qualities. She has exhibited in several Philadelphia art galleries and national magazines.

When I met Ida May, I was struck by her wit and candor and decided to use my medium — film and video — to bring her to a wider audience. I have received partial funding for this project from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. My main focus now is to raise $7,160 to complete all of the videotaping. I ask for your readers' support in this endeavor. Any contribution will be completely tax deductible since the SCEC is serving as the fiscal agent (checks should be made out to SCEC and sent to them at 1341 S. 46th St., Philadelphia, Penn., 19130).

In supporting this project, people will help create a video documentation of the life and work of a unique Philadelphia folk artist.

Elizabeth Lewis
Philadelphia, PA

Classifieds

Recovery Ministries gathering

Recovery Ministries of the Episcopal Church will hold its annual gathering in Sarasota, Fla., June 6-8, 1996. Speakers include Leo Booth, Dick B., and Betsy White. Contact Recovery Ministries, 876 Market Way, Clarkston, GA 30021; (404) 292-2610.

Seeking AIDS Ride sponsors

Deb Martin, who will participate in the July 1-6 Twin Cities-to-Chicago AIDS ride, a bike marathon to support AIDS services in Minnesota and Illinois, is looking for sponsors. Contributions are tax deductible. Contact Deb Martin, Department of Geography, University of Minnesota, 414 Social Science Tower, 267 19th Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55455; e-mail marti050@maroon.tc.umn.edu.

Vocations

Contemplating religious life? Members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory are Episcopalians, clergy and lay, married and single. To explore a contemporary Rule of Life, contact: The Director of Vocations, Brotherhood of St. Gregory, Saint Bartholomew's Church, 82 Prospect Street, White Plains NY 10606-3499.

THE WITNESS
Since 1917

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This month Vital Signs *offers an excerpt from a new book by Dick Doughty that gives his account of Muslim life in Gaza.*

Cover: Sisters studying math at an Arab community center in Dearborn, Mich., photographed by Daymon Hartley.
Back cover: An astrolabe used for making astronomical calculations, photographed by Daymon Hartley.

Islam, a living faith

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Islam means "surrender to peace." The second largest religion in the world, it is on the rise among African Americans and is the faith tradition of many U.S. immigrants.

Despite the voluble concerns of Christians living in Islamic states overseas, this issue is limited to Islam in the U.S., particularly Detroit, which is home to the largest Arab community outside of the Middle East and has an important role in the complex origins of African-American Islam.

In 1980 I met Aliya Hassan, a grandmother of Detroit's Arab community. I had read Malcolm X and been persuaded of the importance of Islam while in high school. And in 1979 I had shuddered at the biased coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis.

My heart warmed when Hassan welcomed me into her apartment. She enjoyed my surprise that she had grown up on a South Dakota homestead, chopping wood, weeding the garden and walking two miles to school.

What set her apart, she said, was that her living room was furnished with a Turkish carpet, low tables and cushions. And her evenings were filled with stories of honor, danger and courage rooted in 18th-century Lebanon.

Hassan's father was a peddler. His horse-drawn wagon or sled made the rounds each morning at dawn.

Hassan's eyes gleamed when she described her father as the best, the strongest and the most respected man in the community. He was skilled with a rifle and a sword and could recite family history from the 1700s forward. He had visited New York, Boston and Mexico in 1876, created his homestead in 1890 and finally welcomed his family to the U.S. in 1920.

Hassan once invited an Arab man into her family's home only to discover that he was her father's enemy. Yet, according to custom, her father told their unlikely guest that having eaten his bread and salt, "You need not be afraid."

When Hassan grew up, she became a licensed investigator for real estate securities, but living in Dearborn — just outside Detroit, she worried about Arabs who spoke no English and couldn't navigate U.S. customs. In 1971, Hassan started ACCESS, the Arab Center for Community and Economic Social Services.

Working the politics of life in the U.S. was possible for Hassan because of her faith.

"For me Islam is the most elastic, the most logical," Hassan said. "You know good from bad. You're not going to hurt anyone. It's the most practical for me *and* I question it."

Sixteen years later, Abdullah El-Amin visited *The Witness'* offices during preparation of this issue. I appreciated being able to question him, because Detroit's African-American Islamic community is increasingly visible in my own life. The food co-op where I shop, which was opened by hippies in the 1970s, is now largely governed by Muslims who understand the politics of clean food. Classmates of my daughter, when she attended a public Waldorf School, prayed five times a day.

And despite El-Amin's references to Satanic forces in American culture, I found myself in surprising accord with his views about the media's damaging influence. Like him, I have been trying to hold my children out of the gushing current of mindless consumerism and violence. Like him, I am doing this in a city that can seem devoid of compassion.

Yet, I have some lingering anxieties. I haven't caught the *heart* of the Islamic message even yet. I wonder about the role of women, even as I know that I would wear the veil if it identified me with cultural resistance.

I am disturbed that Julie Wortman's article in this issue about Muslim young women was considered so accurate that it might cause problems (page 10). Did I know, I was asked, that it is against Islamic law to criticize the faith or the community in front of outsiders?

Yet, as an outsider, Wortman's piece gave me hope for the future of Islam *because* teenagers struggled honestly with their concerns about sex and marriage, their interest in exploring some aspects of U.S. culture and their deep commitment to taking Islam with them wherever they go.

The tenacity and courage of the variety of people whom Marianne Arbogast interviewed for her piece, despite the cost they pay for their views, is encouraging (page 19).

Perhaps just as Jesus is the trickster to fundamentalist paradigms in Christianity, the answer to Islamic blinders is the vision of Muslim feminists and academics, Muslim teenagers and others who believe with Hassan that Islam is "elastic" — a truly living faith that can be questioned. TW

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.

Preaching Jesus to urban teens

by Ron Spann

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

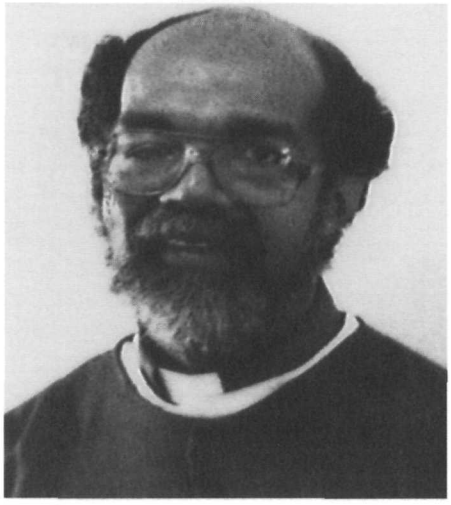
— Romans 1:16 NRSV

I am an African-American Christian pastor who seeks to work redemptively for the life of the black community in a distressed urban setting. While I am not in direct relationship or in proximity with an Islamic community initiative, the rumor of Islam is never farther away than another magazine article, celebrity news maker or album notes on the back of a Gangsta Rap CD. I am asked about the claims of Islam by impressionable young minds. So I, with the community I represent, am as much drawn into the dialectic of their identity formation as the acculturating forces abroad. Nation of Islam posters proclaim Savior's Day, meaning Elijah Mohammed's ascendancy at the beginning of their movement. Who do I say is Savior, and what does that mean? So I, with the community I represent, am drawn into their identity formation and its engagement by all those rumors.

During the Million Man March, the greater public heard what has been common fare on ethnic broadcasting over obscure urban AM bands for years: the teaching of Minister Farrakhan (a childhood Episcopalian) facilely moving between Biblical and Qur'anic texts using the common modality of black rhetorical conventions. It was a vintage sampling of the alternately subtle and specious case made for Islam as a natural fit for African-American religious aspirations.

Ron Spann is rector of Messiah Episcopal Church in Detroit

There is the subtlety of Islamic apologetics, which, for instance, presuppose the whole of Christology except its most core layer, the divinity of Christ. It is flattering, to be sure, when a Farrakhan calls Jesus "Lord and Savior," but he does not at all mean what Christianity does by the same words.



Ron Spann

Similarly, the moral vision of Islam is a sweeping one, and Islamic proponents in the black community show more astuteness in applying their prophetic tradition to the quest for justice in African America than is shown by their Christian counterparts. One has to look back to the student civil rights movement, for instance, to find the everyday heroics professional Muslim athletes show in adhering to their faith publicly when it collides with idols of the dominant culture.

I am asked about the claims of Islam by impressionable young minds.

Worldwide Islam has effectively duplicated every Western and Christian initiative in philanthropy and allied strategies. Louis Farrakhan successfully exploited the American press' excitability with his patent plays for Libyan and Iraqi cash. With no attention from the white press, Saudi and other monies have for years been endowing chairs and constructing major buildings (with Arabic dedications) on historic black campuses like Howard University on a grand scale. All this is timed with reductions in federal monies and shortfalls in alumni funds which have traditionally been the bread and butter of such campuses. The same largess is now being aimed at prison settings.

What's specious is the shoddy way Islam is depicted as an indigenous African religion more authentic to black people than Christianity. The actual history of Islam in West Africa is easily manipulated to obscure its decidedly junior status to Christianity in East African antiquity. Ironically, few urban black dwellers know the significance of so many Churches being called Abyssinian. (It is exceeded in irony, however, by the fact that *'ebed* — slave — is the common Arabic word for any black person, even one who adopts Arabic names and dress.)

For all Farrakhan's excesses, however, he is in step with the core tradition of Islam called *Dawa*, its religious imperative for apologetic witnessing and proselytizing. It remains a dynamic piece of contemporary Islam that politically correct, liberal white (and black) Christians do not apparently appreciate. Islam has a strategic vision of reaching black America by self-consciously seeking conversions.

In the last few years I have enjoyed a closer exchange with Muslim believers, from lifelong Nation of Islam (NOI) protegées to Sunni and Sufi adherents

continued on page 18

And He is With Us

by Rumi

Totally unexpected my guest arrived.
"Who is it?" asked my heart.
"The face of the moon," said my soul.

As he entered the house,
we all ran into the street madly looking for the moon.
"I'm in here," he was calling from inside,
but we were calling him outside unaware of his call.
Our drunken nightingale is singing in the garden,
and we are cooing like doves, "Where, where, where?"

A crowd formed: "Where's the thief?"
And the thief among us is saying,
"Yeah, where's the thief."
All our voices became mixed together
and not one voice stood out from the others.

And He is with you means He is searching with you.
He is nearer to you than yourself. Why look outside?
Become like melting snow; wash yourself of yourself.
With love your inner voice will find a tongue
growing like a silent white lily in the heart.

— Islamic mystic Jelaluddin Rumi, translated by Kabir Helminski in *Love Is A Stranger*, Threshold Books (Brattleboro, Vt.), 1993

Bringing Islam to Detroit

by Camille Colatosti

It's a cool morning in late March. The Dearborn, Mich., street is grimy with the remains of an early spring storm. Mud and dirty snow linger on corners. Two women, wearing traditional Arab *hijabs*—scarves that cover their hair and fold loosely around their necks—walk huddled together. One pushes a baby carriage. They are headed to the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS). One has a doctor's appointment. The other hopes to improve her English and find work. "I don't have experience," she says. "But I can cook and I work hard."

The women are two of the 200,000 Arab Americans who live in the Detroit metropolitan area, the single largest congregation of people of Arab descent outside of the Middle East. This year, as ACCESS celebrates its 25th year of service to the Arab-American community, the Dearborn area marks the centennial of the first Arab American's arrival in Michigan.

The first wave of Arab immigrants, mainly Christians from Syria and what is now Lebanon, came to the U.S. in the 1850s. The decline of the silk industry and the collapse of the Ottoman empire led many to seek a better life in America. They gathered first in New York and then moved westward. This group still composes the majority of the two and one-half million Arab Americans in the U.S. today. Most are now third and fourth generation and have assimilated. According to the 1990 census, 82 percent of Arab Americans are U.S. citizens.

The second wave of immigrants, primarily Muslim, arrived just prior to World War I. "Many came to Detroit to work in what was then a subchaser plant—a plant that made something like a PT boat. This later became the Ford Rouge plant," explains Ismael Ahmed, the energetic director of of ACCESS which employs 80 people in 40 different programs.

A few blocks from ACCESS' main office stand the smoke stacks of Ford's Rouge Plant, the place where Henry Ford perfected the assembly line. He organized a complex that included a foundry, a stamping plant and an assembly factory—where steel was transformed from raw metal to a finished automobile. At its height, the Rouge Plant employed 80,000 to 90,000 workers. It's rumored that Ford encouraged Arab immigration because he had heard Muslims avoid alcohol. "People kept coming," says Ahmed. Immigrants no longer stopped in New York. They came directly to Detroit.

The third wave of immigrants arrived in the 1970s and 80s. Four to five thousand new Arab immigrants came to Detroit each year. Many were fleeing the war in Lebanon. Others came from Israel and Palestine to escape violence and occupation. Ahmed estimates that 3,000 new residents still arrive each year.

"Our children are confused. We have to work twice as hard as normal because we have to destroy the negative knowledge children have learned and then we have to build the new religious knowledge."

— Husham Al-Husainy

The Detroit Arab-American community differs somewhat from those in other parts of the country. "Of all the communities of Arabs in America," explains Ahmed, "the Detroit community is the most working class in its make-up."

Demographics show that, nationally, Arab Americans are more educated and more affluent than the average American. According to Samia El-Badry, president of International Demographic and Economic Associates in Austin, Texas, "The share [of Arab Americans] who did not attend college is lower than average, and the share with master's degrees or higher is twice the average. Eighty percent of Arab Americans aged 16 or older were employed in 1990, compared with 60 percent of all American adults."

While Arab Americans have prospered in the U.S. in general, this is not always the case in Detroit. Significantly, the third intense wave of immigration coincided with a decline in the auto industry. The Ford Rouge plant now employs just 11,000 workers. Ahmed estimates that 30 percent of Arab-American men in Dearborn are unemployed. "A lot of men are now deprived of work," he says. This affects their relationship to their families, their community and to themselves.

Culture

Ahmed insists that there is no such thing as the Arab family. Some are liberal, some conservative; in some the women run the household and in others the women have no voice. But, he adds, "In traditional Arab culture, the family is more important than the individual.

Camille Colatosti teaches English at the Detroit College of Business. Photographer **Daymon Hartley** is on strike from the *Detroit Free Press.*

People can bring disgrace or honor to their family. Whether the man is successful or the woman is chaste—it sounds almost funny to say this here in the U.S.—is important."

The family is the essential unit through which Arabs interact with their community. This is as true for Christian Arabs as for Muslim. "For all are essentially an Islamic culture," Ahmed adds.

Traditionally, he continues, "the man is the outside ambassador, the person who works. The woman runs the household. And given that the culture is homebased, this can be a powerful position."

"In our religion," adds Fatima Abdulla, a 21-year-old woman who works as a secretary at ACCESS, "men and women are equal. We have different roles, but we are equal." Like other American women her age, Abdulla is, as she says, "still figuring out my role," but she believes that the Muslim religion helps her live her life.

"My religion helps me tell right from wrong," she explains. "The *Qur'an* has never changed. It's not going to change. It provides stability and guidance." Muslims understand the *Qur'an* as the speech of God to Muhammad, revealed to the prophet over 23 years (610-32AD). They believe that, since God himself is the author of the *Qur'an*, it is infallible.

Abdulla bases her life on her religion, praying five times a day: before sunrise; in the very early afternoon; in the late afternoon; immediately after sunset; and before retiring and before midnight. She also fasts during the month of Ramadan, refraining from eating, drinking and smoking from sunrise to sunset.

She finds solace in the fact that "there is a reason for everything." Ramadan is the month in which the *Qur'an* was first revealed to Muhammad, and in which Muhammad emigrated to Mecca. As Abdulla explains, "Following my religion makes me feel proud of myself."

Raised in a religious family, Abdulla believes that she became more committed to her faith as she reached adulthood. Still, she understands that she practices her religion differently than her parents do. "Because I was born and raised in this country, I mix it [the Muslim faith] with life here and they mix it with their life in the old country. For example, my mom doesn't feel it's appropriate to mix in with men and I feel I have no choice. And," she adds, "I feel that this is okay. My religion forbids dating without supervision and I agree but I choose to follow my religion in a different way than my parents because I live here."

Arab-American children often negotiate two cultures to see where they fit. Some are successful, as Abdulla has been. Others have difficulty.

Husham Al-Husainy, the director of the Karballa Islamic Education Center, explains the many negative influences that Islamic children face — influences from the media and from the society as a whole. As Al-Husainy put it, "Our children are confused. It is a great challenge to teach them religious knowledge. We have to work twice as hard as normal because we have to destroy the negative knowledge children have learned and then we have to build the new religious knowledge. This can be tough on us. Sometimes," he adds, "the TV is a colorful angel and sometimes a colorful devil."

But, he adds, "We should not keep condemning the media but compete with them." He discusses the importance of developing new techniques and new technologies to show children the value of religious practice. Al-Husainy points to the use of videotapes, cd-roms and the internet to attract the younger generation to the Muslim faith. "We have to listen to the American born generation," he continues. "They have a lot to teach us if we are willing."

Tutoring at ACCESS Daymon Hartley

Nancy Adadow-Gray, director of family counseling and community mental health services at ACCESS, agrees. "What worked in the old country doesn't always work here." She speaks not only about religious practice but about parenting in general. "There is a need to know how to be effective with children. For many, the old discipline needs to change."

Language barriers may also create family problems. "In many cases," says

Holding to the faith

by Julie A. Wortman

A group of 20 Muslim girls aged 14-19 swarm around boxes of pizza and bottles of soft drinks late on a Monday afternoon in a private meeting room in a large western U.S. city where Arab Muslims have been known to get along for years at a stretch without needing to know English or interact with non-Muslim "Americans." It is a tight community, held together by immigrant traditions, mosques and shared economic struggle.

Three quarters of these teens wear the *hijab.* Perhaps because this head covering makes them look demure, I had succumbed, during our polite introductions, to the stereotypical idea that these young women would likely be quieter, shyer and more restrained than the outspoken teenaged girls at my own suburban church back home.

But the pizza proved me wrong.

As they grabbed for plates and poured out drinks they were just as exuberantly full of lively chatter, just as frequently inclined to small shrieks of surprise, just as self-conscious when suddenly the focus of some playful kidding.

Finally looking past their head gear, I could see that they also dressed pretty much the same — in the jeans, sweaters and jackets which have become standard teen issue across the continent.

But unlike the young women I know at home, who are as familiar with the local mall, movie multiplex or sports facility as they are with home and school, this community center is one of the few places where these young Arab-American women can respectably spend free time.

And outside of brothers and cousins, boys are off limits. Mixed school rooms are okay, but socializing with boys — especially through dating, but even on the phone — is out.

Tana Moore

Still, even though their community's traditional values of modesty prevent them from taking the sex education classes available in their public high school, sex, as for the teens of my acquaintance, is very much on these girls' minds.

But while the girls in my church focus on dating and think of marriage in terms of the far-off future, for these young Muslim women who are unlikely ever to go out to a movie or attend a dance alone with a boy, the intimacies of married life are an immediate concern. A quarter are already married and most of the rest will have husbands by their 19th birthdays.

This is a community norm they seem to take for granted, perhaps because they and their families still have strong connections with the Middle East — half were born there, as were all of their parents.

But they are sensitive to being labelled "boaters," a term for freshly arrived immigrants oblivious to this country's dominant culture. Knowing and operating in that culture, they understand, will be an inevitable part of helping their working-class families free themselves of dependence on the uncertain employment opportunities offered by downsized industrial and agricultural workforces.

This means some familiar norms must shift.

This afternoon these teenagers talk frankly about the choices before them. No matter what, they seem very clear, Islam will be their guide.

"When I tell people about Islam I don't emphasize what's prohibited," one group member says. Describing what sounds to me like a version of my own childhood experience of Catholic friends reciting lists of different categories of sins they were expected to confess before being able to take communion, she and others in the group speak of Muslims who know only the don'ts of Islam and none of the whys.

"A lot of people abuse the word 'forbidden,' " another girls says. "But Islam is a way to live my life happier, healthier, more secure."

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Julie A. Wortman is managing editor of *The Witness.* Artist **Tana Moore** lives in Southfield, Mich.

Ahmed, "the parents speak Arabic and haven't learned English well. The kids interpret life for them. So, of course, the parents lose some authority."

To strengthen the community, to bridge gaps between the generations, ACCESS organizes programs that increase everyone's understanding of the positive attributes of Arab culture. ACCESS brought storytellers from Egypt, for example, to teach people about ancient oral traditions. ACCESS displays art works from all over the Middle East and brings in musicians from around the country.

Programs also validate the artistry of residents. Recently, for example, older women immigrants taught a needlework class to younger Arab-American women. "The needlework is intricate and labor intensive," explains Ahmed. "One of the teachers made a beautiful dress that took nine months to embroider. She used a fine pinpoint needlework. The breast plate of this dress tells everyone where the wearer is from—what her village is, what her traditions are. Another Arab could look at this dress and say to the wearer, 'Oh, you're from Bethlehem.' Or, 'you're from Galilee.' The dress is a work of art. But there is no market for this in the U.S. This kind of needlework was becoming a lost art. So we decided to try to preserve it by teaching another generation."

Along with art classes, ACCESS displays traditional Arabic artifacts. The dress that took nine months to embroider hangs in one of the many glass cases that line the walls of the center. One case is filled with Christian and Jewish artifacts from the Middle East; another displays Islamic artifacts; and a third promotes Islamic contributions to science and architecture.

Combatting stereotypes

Ahmed believes that the promotion of a positive cultural heritage is part of the "struggle to build a better life for our folks." By this he refers not just to Arab Americans but, as he explains, "to all low-income folks, to people who have to confront negative stereotypes all the time." Ahmed points to a store owner ACCESS recently picketed. "The guy was selling Arab masks for Halloween."

Turning toward Mecca Daymon Hartley

Negative images and stereotypes of Arab Americans result from several factors, explains Ahmed. He describes a Western "Orientalism"—a view that everything in the East is strange, exotic, different. "In this Orientalist view," says Ahmed, "Arab women are belly dancers and Arab men are sheiks. These images, of course, have nothing to do with people's real lives."

"In our religion, men and women are equal. We have different roles, but we are equal." — Fatima Abdulla

Ahmed also believes that U.S. foreign policy affects American images of Arabs. "After the 1967 Arab-Israel war," says Ahmed, "images took a much worse turn. At best, Arabs are seen as overemotional and angry people who can't be trusted. At worst, Arabs are seen as terrorists." To Ahmed, the stereotyping is akin to the portrayal of the Japanese during World War II. "There are some ideas that we are not quite human," says Ahmed.

This comparison is apt. According to James Abourezk, a former U.S. Senator from South Dakota and leader of the national Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), "In 1987, ADC obtained an Immigration and Naturalization Service memo which outlined a detailed plan to establish an internment camp for Arabs in the event of a war by the U.S. against an Arab country."

The goal of the ADC is to protect the rights of people of Arab descent, to end stereotyping of Arabs in the media and to fight discrimination in employment, education, and politics.

Negative media images include ones which may, at first, seem harmless. Disney's Aladdin, for example, sings of his "barbaric" homeland. In the film, only Aladdin and his princess speak proper English. All other Arab characters have thick, harsh accents.

Finally, an Arab guard threatens to cut

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Most of these teens, in fact, see themselves as becoming more observant than their parents as their lives unfold here in the U.S.

"We're more educated," one of the older ones offers in explanation. "We know more about Islam."

Too often, several complain, their parents mistake cultural customs for religious law. They are proud of being Arab-American, but not necessarily of the patriarchal assumptions embedded in that ethnic identity. Islam, they say, is not sexist.

One girl tells of an acquaintance whose parents wouldn't let her accept a scholarship to a prestigious university because that would mean she would have to leave her parents' home and move on campus.

"It isn't right," she says. "All her life they push for her to do well at school and then they don't let her go away to college."

Islam prizes education very highly, she points out, a fact which she believes should override a cultural assumption that an unmarried woman should live at home.

The leader of today's discussion, Lila Mohamed, agrees. A 26-year-old Muslim woman of Arab descent who works as a teen and HIV/AIDS counselor, she tells of her own experience of going away to college. Friends kept telling her parents that she would be "ruined" by the experience, that after graduation she would not come back home to live as an unmarried Muslim woman should.

She proved them wrong, she says, "but if a boy calls me up on the phone my father still doesn't want me to talk to him. If a girl calls my brother my father doesn't care."

The sexist double standard goes deep. These girls know they would be ostracized if they do not come to their wedding beds virgins, but virtually every one of them thinks their brothers or male cousins are sexually active.

"Our parents think teenagers here are rotten," says one girl. So they customarily send both sons and daughters back to their own mother countries to find "suitable" marriage partners on the theory that these wives and husbands will strengthen their children's ethnic and religious ties. Presumably, Muslims in countries that are Muslim will be more observant.

Some of the group members seem to have accepted this reasoning, as they reveal in the course of responding to a brief presentation Mohamed makes to them on the transmission and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS.

"If you marry a boy from this community, you could get infected," says one. "But [Muslim] boys in Arab countries are less likely to have it."

But another member of the group receives several nods of agreement as she counters: "Just because someone is from an Arab country doesn't mean they are a good Muslim. My husband is from Saudi Arabia and he doesn't follow Islam that closely."

Mohamed affirms this observation with the sobering statistic that there have been more than 150,000 cases of HIV/AIDS reported in the Middle East. The young woman who thought Arab boys were less likely to be at risk appears startled at the revelation.

Like many of her contemporaries in the group, she has seemed surprisingly well-informed about the details and risks of various types of sexual activity — Mohamed tells them they are light years ahead of their parents in this respect — but her apparent naiveté or, perhaps, ethnic loyalty, is also shared by many of her companions. Throughout the conversation, I've been aware of several young women who have been absolutely quiet, even embarassed, by the frank exchanges.

Every girl here, it seems clear, is attempting to hold in tension her desire to be a good Arab Muslim daughter with the need to fit sufficiently well into this Eurocentric, culturally Christian society to have a decent economic future. Several mention their plans for post-high school studies with pride.

As they feel their way, they say over and over, Islam provides trustworthy guidance. One stresses that it is up to them, in fact, as the mothers of the next generation, to instill in their children the life-giving pillars of the faith — God's oneness, the prayers, the charity, the fasting and Islamic unity — but not ncecessarily the cultural biases that contradict Islam's teachings.

Already, as this afternoon's discussion has hinted, some of those biases are under assault. I think, too, of a young Jordanian girl who seemed particularly outspoken at different moments in the discussion. At one point she asked, apparently thinking of herself: "What if a Jordanian girl wants to be with a boy whose family is from Kuwait? If he's a Muslim shouldn't that be enough?"

For this generation of young Arab-American Muslim women, still strongly influenced by parents who find stability and solace in ethnic identification with their birth countries, it may not be.

But what they teach their children will likely be something different.

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off a young girl's hand for stealing food for a hungry child. The ADC fears that such images encourage the false belief that Arabs are different and violent.

Even more dangerous, in 1993 the ADC learned of a U.S. military training film that presented Arab terrorism as the main threat to Americans. Albert Mokhiber of the ADC explains, "The film focused only on the Middle East, specifically on Arabs and Muslims. But a 1990 U.S. State Department report on terrorist patterns showed that only eight of 233 anti-U.S. incidents that year were attributed to residents of Middle Eastern countries."

The El Toro Marine Corps Air Station, which showed the film, pulled it in response to the ADC's concerns. But the association of Arab and terrorist in the minds of many U.S. residents and law enforcement officials plays itself out both locally and nationally. In Dearborn, where Arab Americans compose more than 25 percent of the city population, police have a history of treating Arab-American teens unfairly and sometimes ruthlessly. ACCESS recently won a five year legal battle against 17 cases of police brutality.

The immediate reaction of law enforcement officials and many Americans to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing provides an instructive example. Before Michigan Militia member Timothy McVeigh, a white man, was arrested, the police initially identified suspects who were, they said, "Middle Eastern looking." Later developments proved that these initial identifications were, at best, mistaken, and, at worst, fabricated from stereotypes. Nevertheless, Immigration and Naturalization Service Officials in Oklahoma and Texas detained three Arab-American men. A Jordanian-American man, Ibrahim Abdullah Hassan Ahmad, who was flying from Oklahoma City to Chicago, was stopped and questioned. Authorities held him for hours.

"I'm sure that hundreds left Oklahoma City that day," Ahmad told *The Los Angeles Times*, "but I was the only one stopped to be questioned. Because of my looks. It doesn't matter what citizenship you're carrying. It's just your look, your look."

Daymon Hartley

Arab child running home from school in southwest Detroit.

Ahmad is an American citizen, as are many of the hundreds of Arab Americans who reported harassment. Yaser Elmenshawy, executive director of the Islamic Public Affairs Council, told Reuters that the days immediately following the bombing were "a roller coaster ride for Muslims. Muslims are America's favorite whipping boy. When in doubt, blame the Muslims," he said.

The ADC's Albert Mokhiber agrees. "Any time there is a controversy involving the Middle East, there seems to be a backlash. During the Gulf War, there was a 300 percent increase in hate crimes against Arab Americans. Of course, none of them had anything to do with the Gulf War. Most of them were not Kuwaiti or Iraqi but Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinians of second or third generation."

ACCESS' Ahmed fears that the situation may get worse for Arab Americans before it gets better. He points to what he describes as "the huge, growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the country. There are legislative efforts to strip all immigrants of their rights, to deny them medicare and social security even if they have worked for these things."

So many Americans forget that they, themselves, come from families who originated somewhere else. "Whether their families came here by choice, or by force as slaves, they arrived and, with struggle, assimilated. There is now opposition to this American tradition," says Ahmed. In Dearborn, where Arabic is the native language of more than 40 percent of the student body, the school board recently refused a $4 million grant they had received to institute an Arabic/English dual language program. "There is opposition to learning other languages and learning about other cultures," says Ahmed. "Where will this end?" TW

> *"At best, Arabs are seen as overemotional and angry people who can't be trusted. At worst, Arabs are seen as terrorists. Where will this end?"* — *Ismael Ahmed*

Beyond Malcolm X and Farrakhan:
the African-American experience of Islam

by Larry Gabriel

The image of African-American Islam in Detroit can be spotty for outsiders. Young men in dark suits hawking newspapers and bags of fruit on street corners, groups of women in long white dresses gathered outside a mosque.

Fueled by sensational media reports and a Judeo-Christian perspective, non-Muslims often view them with a mistrustful eye. Television brings us images of a strident Louis Farrakhan or intransigent Middle Eastern terrorists. Some conclude that Islam is about race hatred and death.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," said Abdullah Bey El-Amin, chairman of the Muslim Center in Detroit. "Islam is the religion of peace."

Until the last few decades, Islam was an unknown concept to most Americans — the foreign-sounding names of its practitioners attached more strangeness to it. As the Islamic population grows, people are beginning to understand Muslims on a more personal level.

The vast majority of Muslims lead quiet, worship-filled lives. Taslimah Bey found a loving community during her early contacts with Muslims in the mid-1970s, when Detroit was considered the murder capital of the United States.

"I remember around Joy and Dexter, that was the safest neighborhood because so many Muslims lived around there," said Bey. "You could walk down the street and nothing would happen to you. You never worried about getting mugged or anything. ... It was a community right inside Detroit. That's what attracted me to it."

Jazz drummer James Brown remembers the scene during the 1960s, when he first became interested in Islam through reading the newspaper "Muhammad Speaks."

"I was influenced by the moral character," said Brown. "The fact that there was unity there. There were businesses on Linwood near the mosque. From Chicago Boulevard to Davison there were restaurants, grocery stores, cleaners, barber shops, fish markets and bakeries."

A peek beyond the facade of this community gives a sense of the complexity of the world of Islam in Detroit. Brown belongs to Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam (NOI), the most visible of the groups which splintered from Elijah Muhammad's NOI after his death in 1975. Their mosque is on Wyoming on Detroit's northwest side. Bey is more of a traditional Muslim. She prays at the Islamic Student Center at Cass and Forest because it is near her home.

"I remember around Joy and Dexter, that was the safest neighborhood because so many Muslims lived around there. You never worried about getting mugged or anything." — *Taslimah Bey*

There are numerous mosques and streams of Islam practiced here. John Muhammad, a brother of Elijah Muhammad, leads a Temple on Hamilton in Highland Park. He claims, as do several others, to be the true bearer of the message that Elijah Muhammad taught.

Among traditional, or orthodox, Muslims, there are Sunni, Shiite, Hanafi and Sufi sects. El-Amin, a Sunni who is also the executive director of the Council of Islamic Organizations in Michigan, says there are 25 mosques in the Detroit area. He estimates there are 6,000 to 7,000 African-American Muslims in Detroit who are predominately focused around seven or eight mosques in the city.

Islam among African Americans came to the United States with the Africans who were captured and brought here for slave labor. Probably more of the enslaved Africans were Muslims than adherents of the polytheistic animist religions that are associated with voodoo.

Mistaking African-American Muslims for animists has persisted. As late as 1937, researcher Erdmann Beynon's study of Elijah Muhammad's NOI published in the *American Journal of Sociology* was titled "The Voodoo Cult Among Negro Migrants in Detroit."

Although snippets of Islam survived among African-American descendants, Christianity became the dominant religion. The first organized Islamic groups among African Americans in Detroit didn't appear until the early 1900s. The Moorish Science Temple, founded in New Jersey by Noble Drew Ali in 1913, established temples in several cities, including Detroit.

Historian Paul Lee, who consulted with filmmaker Spike Lee (no relation) during the making of the movie "Malcolm X," reports another early effort: "Dousa Muhammad Ali visited here as early as 1919, and established

Larry Gabriel is a striking *Detroit Free Press* reporter. Photographer **Daymon Harley** is also on strike.

Daymon Hartley

African-American women praying at the Muslim Center in Detroit.

a traditional mosque right here in Highland Park."

Ali's movement had a nationalistic response to American racism and claimed that Islam was the original religion of the so-called Negro. Nationalism was growing among African Americans; Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement, with its quasi-religious edge, garnered millions of followers in the early 1920s. But Ali's murder in 1920 splintered his organization, as did the Garvey movement after his 1925 imprisonment for mail fraud and his subsequent deportation in 1927.

It was into this nationalist consciousness that Wali Fard Muhammad stepped when he established his Nation of Islam, the most documented African-American Islamic community to date. "Racial prejudice is so prevalent in society, it's easy to want to embrace that kind of thinking," said El-Amin while conceding that the NOI was able to change some lives for the better.

Fard Muhammad brought his race-based message to Detroit in 1930, the second year of the Great Depression. He was a door-to-door peddler selling raincoats and, later, silks in the black ghetto. After gaining entrance to homes, Fard (also known as Farrad or Ford) would speak to African Americans about their home country and their true religion. The Bible, with which most of his contacts were familiar, served as his preliminary text although he made key interpretations. It was among former followers of Ali and Garvey that his message was most welcome. Soon, his informal meetings in homes grew to the point that collections were taken to rent a hall.

Detroit, in 1930, was a boom town that had just gone bust. During the past two decades hundreds of thousands of people had migrated to the center of the burgeoning auto industry for work. Southerners came in swarms.

Elijah Poole left Georgia for Detroit with his wife and two children in 1923 after a run-in with a white employer. In Detroit, he found work at the Chevrolet auto plant and worked there until 1929, the year of the stock market crash.

The unemployed Poole went to his first meeting in 1931 and shortly after began to study Islam. He quickly became a minister, was given the name Elijah Muhammad and became one of Fard's closest deputies.

By the time Fard disappeared in 1934, about 8,000 African Americans in Detroit had embraced his religion. But among the ministers he left behind, there was a power struggle that led to the splintering of the group.

"Elijah Muhammad claimed Fard Muhammad's mantle but he did so under the objections of the other students," said historian Lee. "He claimed that Fard Muhammad had left him in charge, and, as a matter of fact, had declared him to be the Messenger of Allah. Problem was no one else heard that. Fard Muhammad apparently didn't do this in the presence of anybody but Elijah Muhammad. So the movement split.

"I have reliable information that at least four of the splinters eventually evolved into traditional Islam. This makes one wonder about Fard Muhammad's actual intent. I would not be surprised if Fard Muhammad intended that the Na-

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Finding equality under Islam

Islam gives Abdullah El-Amin hope. He practices it in resistance to the assault of U.S. culture on everyone, but especially on children.

"You can't drive the freeway without reading messages that use sexuality and denigrate women. There are no movies you can go see except Walt Disney," El-Amin laments with a quiet smile. "Movies and rap boys denigrate women and language."

In response, El-Amin, the executive director of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan, says that Muslims try to insulate their children from some of the media.

"We think it's a satanic influence that's trying to destroy our society," he says. "These kids really have a hard time exercising restraint. Islam forbids pork (including pepperoni), alcohol, adultery, fornication — these things that people think are a free lifestyle."

El-Amin contends that the discipline *could* come easily for children, if they were in a healthy environment.

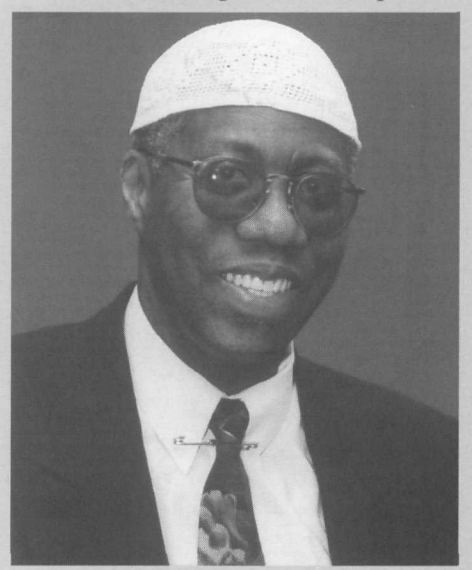
"We believe it's innate in children to want to live morally and in accord with nature," he says. But being constantly confronted with immorality presents "a tremendous struggle."

A struggle that may best be fought by adults who are people of faith.

El-Amin is inviting interfaith religious leaders to begin a pattern of prayerful gatherings at urban and suburban sites where women are denigrated or violence endorsed.

El-Amin's conversion took place in the mid-1970s, after a friend supplied books and tapes. But the pivotal image for El-Amin was of Imam Wallace Muhammad pointing to his head, saying "Man is mind." For an introspective young man, the image was hopeful.

"The single most important thing that can turn people around from immorality is adhering to the number one principle — there is nothing to be worshiped except God," El-Amin says. "The human being is the crown of creation. If you're on such a lofty level, that can only serve to overcome feelings of inferiority. The majority of African Americans have inferiority complexes brought on by the racism they experience in this country. Similarly, you can't find Caucasians that don't have superiority complexes.



Abdullah Bey El-Amin

"This religion equalizes — we are all equal under God. If you know this you're a lot less likely to do things that are destructive."

— Abdullah El-Amin

"This religion equalizes — we are all equal under God. If you know this you're a lot less likely to do things that are destructive. This faith fits my frame of mind and experience. I am able to connect spiritually with the creation."

El-Amin is circumspect when speaking of the Nation of Islam. He believes that the turnout for the Million Man March indicates the depth of "the great spiritual and moral void in this country — not only among black men but among all people. We need to be called back to morality and basic common sense."

And he recognizes Louis Farrakhan as "a great orator who gives the downtrodden some hope."

But he is critical of Elijah Muhammad's contention that Muhammad is God, a concept he says was borrowed from Christianity. Elevating anyone or anything to the level of God is the one sin, according to the *Qur'an*, that Allah will not forgive.

"Elijah Muhammad did some masterful psychology. He said the black man is God; the white man is demon. But it's artificial."

For El-Amin, conversion to Islam was not a conversion to a political agenda.

"So many people have misconceptions of the heart of a Muslim. People assume that I heard Malcolm X, that I was under that time of militant conversion. Or they assume that we change our names to drop the slave name. It might be a little of that, but we choose these names because they are attributes of God and Muhammad."—*Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann*

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tion of Islam should evolve into traditional Islam. It appears to me that Elijah Muhammad's presentation was essentially self serving. His teachings put himself at the center of the religion."

During the power struggle, Elijah Muhammad was forced to flee Detroit and he eventually settled in Chicago, where he established the Nation of Islam, popularly known as the Black Muslims. The original Detroit temple eventually aligned with Elijah Muhammad's NOI.

While the Nation made no great gains in followers in the next decade, they certainly got the attention of authorities. In the mid-1930s they clashed with Detroit's Board of Education over Muslim children attending a then-unlicensed University of Islam.

In 1950, after two NOI Muslims fought with police outside the temple and were shot, *The Detroit Free Press* investigated the group. An internal memo reported that there were about 2,500 Black Muslims in Detroit. The memo further reported: "The only trouble comes when whites brush up against them too close. ... The number one asset of this bunch is that they are supposed to be very neat and clean. ... This is a crackpot group and may be a money-making racket for the top boys."

Whatever they were, after August 1952, when Malcolm X arrived in Detroit, the NOI would be taken a whole lot more seriously.

Malcolm Little was born in Nebraska and raised in Lansing, Michigan, where his Garveyite father was killed by a group of whites. After moving to the east coast, he became a thief and street hustler known as Detroit Red. In 1946, at the ago of 20, Detroit Red went to prison. When he was paroled in 1952, he was a Muslim.

Malcolm X came to live with his brother Wilfred in Paradise Valley, a vibrant ghetto area full of hotels, bars and stores east of where the Chrysler Freeway now runs through downtown Detroit. The NOI was then still a small community. Many traditional African-American Muslims gravitated toward other mosques, particularly one on the far west side that catered to the Arab population of Dearborn.

The NOI had Monday, Wednesday and Friday meetings in a temple at 1474 Frederick. While Malcolm X was enthralled by the neat, respectful people he met there, he was disappointed that there were so few of them among the huge population of blacks in the city. He set out to change that by recruiting among the people in bars, poolrooms and on street corners — the very places he had frequented during his criminal life.

His strategy was successful, as he wrote in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*: "With a few months of plugging away, however, our storefront Temple Number One about tripled its membership. And that so deeply pleased Mr. Muhammad that he paid us the honor of a personal visit."

Within a year, Malcolm X was assistant minister at Temple Number One. Over that time he held a succession of jobs including one at a furniture store and another at Ford Motor Company. But his real work was propagating the NOI.

"Every day after work, I walked, 'fishing' for potential converts in the Detroit black ghetto. I saw the African features of my black brothers and sisters whom the devilish white man had brainwashed" (*Autobiography of Malcolm X*).

Courtesy *Salaam* (July 1960)

Elijah Muhammad flanked by sons Nathaniel, Wallace, Akbar, Elijah, Jr. and Herbert.

Over the next 10 years, with the help of Malcolm X's evangelism, the NOI would grow as it never had before.

Malcolm X's missionary skills proved so adept that he was sent from city to city to establish temples. By 1975, the year of Elijah Muhammad's death, scholars estimate there were 500,000 in his NOI. Of course by then, Malcolm X would be long dead, killed by an assassin's bullet after being ousted from the NOI.

During the power struggle, Elijah Muhammad was forced to flee Detroit and he eventually settled in Chicago, where he established the Nation of Islam popularly known as the Black Muslims.

In the early 1960s, Malcolm X's popularity as spokesman for Elijah Muhammad swelled. He was seen as the heir apparent to Elijah Muhammad's mantle and jealousies flared within the NOI. Trouble

began when Malcolm X started talking about Elijah Muhammad's adultery and came to a head when he spoke publicly about President Kennedy's assassination. In March, 1964, Malcolm X was ousted from the NOI. On Feb. 21, 1965, Malcolm X was shot dead by a group of black men at the Audubon ballroom in Harlem.

During the 50 weeks between his ousting and murder, Malcolm X did what most NOI dissidents did — he led his followers toward traditional Islam.

But the NOI kept moving on. Minister Louis Farrakhan, who had been recruited by Malcolm X, took over his former mentor's duties. And the aging and increasingly enfeebled Elijah Muhammad still visited Detroit, where he had begun his ministry.

"In 1965, Elijah Muhammad came to Detroit and spoke at Cobo Hall," said James Brown, who later joined the NOI. "He talked about the harm that cigarettes, alcohol and eating pork did to the human body. I stopped smoking then."

The NOI was rocked again when Elijah Muhammad died in 1975. His son, Wallace Muhammad, then tried to lead the NOI toward traditional Islam. In doing that, he had to repudiate some of his father's teachings, and that turned off many of his followers. Most left the NOI with Wallace Muhammad, some left Islam altogether.

"The great bulk of the Muslims were able to accept the changes and embrace Wallace Muhammad's presentation of traditional Islam," Lee said. "Some didn't. One of my best friends, he works in a drug rehabilitation program in Detroit, says a number of the brothers he talks to in there say that they got on the streets following the revelations of '75 and '76. I'm sure that would replicate throughout the U.S."

During the 50 weeks between his ousting [from the NOI] and murder, Malcolm X did what most NOI dissidents did — he led his followers toward traditional Islam.

For many of those who held fast to Elijah Muhammad's message, Louis Farrakhan has led them into still another incarnation of the NOI. He is the most prominent and charismatic of those who claim the leadership that Elijah Muhammad once had.

"After Elijah Muhammad died I watched to see what happened," said Brown. "It faded away until Mr. Farrakhan started to rebuild. I've watched things come together."

But Farrakhan's followers are fewer than those who followed Elijah Muhammad. Some estimates put them at 50,000 nationally — a fraction of the half-million followers of his predecessor.

Still, the NOI grabs headlines with its sponsorship of the Million Man March and Farrakhan's recent tour of Middle Eastern countries. On the other hand, traditional Islam is quietly growing. El-Amin says that four or five people take the declaration of faith at his mosque each week.

"People are coming now not because of political reasons," said El-Amin. "They are joining because of their love of Allah and desire to serve the one God." TW

Preaching Jesus,

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who became Muslims as adults. I have sat spellbound under the allegorizing tutelage of a black Imam from Kansas, whose treatment of texts from Isaiah were worthy of Clement and Origen of Alexandria. I have been disarmed by the passion for justice of a community ally in Metro Detroit who is a Yemenite American who is also a world-music spin doctor. I am convinced of his vocation as a community developer.

These contacts have been crucial for putting a human face on my Muslim neighbor. They have been essential for me to recognize the resonances of truth that lie richly in the lived humanity of these Muslim friends. They have also kindled a deeper kind of burning within me to be able to share the depths of the gift of the indwelling Christ as I have come to know him and the intuitive vision he stirs in me of the possibilities of human community through the grace of human unity with God. It is something I cannot be indifferent to or treat as of relative value. It is a constant and unwavering certitude of my heart that Jesus is Lord.

There is a spiritual receptor in all human experience of whatever origins in faith that binds uniquely with the revealed love of God in Christ. Middle-class western Christianity must recover its confidence in that Christ, his salvation and its irreducible relevance to the entire spectrum of human existence.

I am intrigued by the idea of extending Niebuhr's image of Christ "in and yet over and against"culture into the inter-faith paradigm. There is something in every culture that requires his judgment, his corrective, in order that the human soul and community can grow true. In any case, the seeming humility of Christian repentance for being the source of all the world's ills, confuses things. It overstates itself to the point of dismissing the preeminence of Christ as if he is a mere function or conceit of their own cultural evolution. Because it is not true, it cannot foster authentic dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

Being true to ourselves evokes the kind of humility that will make us true seekers of peace and friendship. TW

An Islamic theology based on justice and peace

by Marianne Arbogast

Around the time the *Witness* staff began to talk about an issue on Islam, a news brief appeared in a local paper, reporting that a Filipina teenage girl, working as a maid in the United Arab Emirates, had been sentenced to 100 cane lashings for killing her employer, who had raped her.

While I would like to believe I am free of the grosser stereotypes concerning Islam, I know that stories like this one have seeped into my subconscious, prejudicing my perceptions of the Islamic faith. I know that Christians are no less guilty of violence, vengefulness and repression of women — and have often defended them on religious grounds — but I also know that compassion, forgiveness and liberation are at the heart of the Gospel.

"People easily fall into the temptation of comparing the worst of Islam with the best of their own worldview," wrote Richard Deats in *Fellowship* magazine several years ago. Wanting to avoid that trap, I sought out some American Muslims who are working toward a theology and practice based on justice and peace.

Rabia Harris

Rabia Harris is the coordinator of the Muslim Peace Fellowship (MPF), an affiliate of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

The daughter of a Jewish father and an Episcopalian mother, Harris was attracted to Islam by Muslims who "were so centered, so courteous, so morally acute, that I had no resistance." A member of a Sufi order (Sufism is a strain in Islam which emphasizes its spiritual core), she is pledged to a life of prayer and service, and speaks of "the center of reality" as "coming into touch with God."

Harris is committed to nonviolence, and contends that modern warfare cannot meet the strict standards for a just war laid down in Islamic teaching.

Rabia Harris

Through its literature and by its very existence, MFP challenges the notion that Islam condones violence.

"Every chapter of the *Qur'an* begins with the words, 'In the name of Allah, most beneficent, most merciful,'" Harris says. "Beneficence and mercy are those attributes that God takes most seriously. We are asked to say those words before we do anything.

> *"We believe that peace — Salaam — is one of the names of God."*
>
> *— Rabia Harris*

"We believe that peace — *Salaam* — is one of the names of God. It's a name we're supposed to invoke on one another all the time in the Muslim greeting. Our first responsibility is to bring peace into being by following the teaching that comes to us through the Prophet, who is described as having been sent as a mercy to the universes."

In its first two years, MPF has brought Bosnian students to the U.S. on scholarship, led a grassroots postcard campaign against the sanctions on Iraq, and worked with Muslims in U.S. prisons.

Zaineb Istrabadi

When the federal building in Oklahoma City was bombed, the telephone in Edward Said's office rang incessantly with calls from reporters wanting a "reaction" from Said — an Episcopalian of Palestinian heritage who has written extensively on justice for Palestinians.

"They didn't know who was responsible," says Zaineb Istrabadi, a member of MPF who works with Said at Columbia University. "They assumed it was Muslims or Arabs. It makes me angry and sad — as if someone were to stereotype Christianity based on the Spanish Inquisition."

Istrabadi was raised in Baghdad, but has lived in the U.S. for 26 years.

"It is very painful for me to hear Christians being critical of Islam without understanding it," she says. "Muslims have much more in common with Christians than differences."

Istrabadi deplores the situation in many countries that "claim to be implementing Islamic law.

"The law consists not only in punishment, but in mercy as well. The law says that, in times of famine, it is all right to

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Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*.

steal from someone who has more than you. But in Somalia they were chopping off people's hands for stealing. [The authorities] were actually violating Islamic law."

Istrabadi sees attempts to restrict women's participation in public life as "a degeneration in the understanding of Islam.

"Men and women stand equally before God. We have no clergy as such; there is a direct relationship between men and women and God. What we have are *ulama* — people versed in theology and jurisprudence. Men and women can become theologians and jurists. In medieval times there were many women teaching in universities. Today, women are insisting on the rights given them by God, of which society has deprived them."

Nawal Amar

Nawal Amar, a professor of criminal justice at Kent State University who has also taught college courses on Islam, testifies to the unique obstacles faced by American Muslim women who insist on these rights.

Born in Beirut of a Lebanese mother and Egyptian father who both worked for the United Nations, Amar lived in Lebanon, Kuwait, Iraq, Syria and England before coming to the U.S. in 1982. After a period of religious questioning in her 20s, she returned to her Islamic heritage deeply convinced of its value for women.

"The *Qur'an* encourages the education of women," she says. "My mother received a masters degree from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1952. Islam was liberating for my own family.

"If you look at the history of Islam, during the Prophet's time and for the first few years after his death, women were highly liberated. The Prophet's wives worked. Only one had his child. Others worked in the political and economic arenas, and helped him in conversion. There were 200 women among those who created the *shari'a* [the body of law based on the Koran, the scriptural word of God, and the *hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet].

"Women are addressed in the *Qur'an*. Women are economic beings, allowed to inherit. Islam sees men and women as born from the same soul, brothers and sisters in belief."

Amar believes that a return to Islamic roots will uncover rich sources of liberation.

Nawal Amar

"Because a large number of Muslims are unaware of the original texts, *shari'a* is what gets to them," she says. "It has progressively been created to suit conservative ideologies."

But in her struggle for an Islamic "liberation theology," Amar feels as marginalized by non-Muslim feminists as she is by conservative American Muslims.

"I have paid a price for not bashing my own culture, for not saying Islam is a patriarchal religion. When I say, let's see what is liberating within the tradition, some feminists dismiss me completely."

Muslim women with a liberation perspective are "between a rock and a hard place," Amar says. "On the one hand are the Euro-centric feminists who want to unclaim us. On the other hand are conservative Muslim men who are highly integrated in this culture, who see us as dangerous because we are highly educated and in certain power positions. They know less about Islam than we do, but because we are attacking their power, they tell the American public we are not really Muslims."

She points to a peace and conflict studies program at a Christian college which has three Muslims on its board — all men.

"The idea of cultural diversity is in the American societal fabric, but it excludes women," she says.

Amar is currently embroiled in a controversy which she says is "symbolic of my entire life." A state college at which she taught Islam for several years has been offered $1 million to create an Islamic chair — on the condition that she not be included in the design or hiring process. She has been told that the benefactors — a group of conservative Muslim men — have made it clear that they expect the college to choose a Muslim man for the position, and are withholding half the money until a professor is appointed.

> *"If you look at the history of Islam, during the Prophet's time and for the first few years after his death, women were highly liberated."*
>
> *— Nawal Amar*

"The people on the faculty committee are my friends, but they are now afraid to talk to me," she says. "The chair of the department is a very liberal man who created the union at the university, but he

is completely paralyzed. When I go to the feminists in that university, they say, we have nothing to do with that, an Islamic chair is not something we want.

"When you have an Islamic chair supported by a conservative agenda, Islam will be interpreted in a conservative manner. They're winning the fight because American liberals are willing to take the money and run."

Aminah McCloud

Aminah McCloud, an African-American professor of Islamic Studies at De Paul University in Chicago, was drawn to Islam as a teenager by its "sense of egalitarianism and sense of a personal relationship with God. There was not a favoring of one class or color or gender of people over another. There was also the sense that I am fully responsible for my actions — which forces a different kind of relationship with people."

While disavowing the brand of feminism that "has focused on the issues of the majority population, and has not prevented white women from being racist," McCloud is firmly committed to helping women "see themselves as human agents."

She recently took part in an International Women's Day in Paris sponsored by groups concerned about violence toward women in Iran.

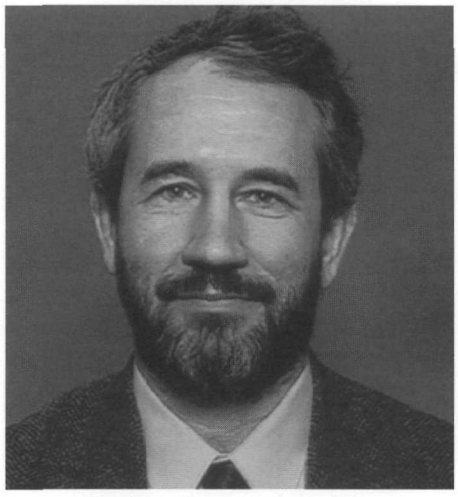
"They're literally executing women for not being dressed properly," she says, condemning the tyranny under "what is called an Islamic government." At the same time, she bristles at too quick a condemnation of the justice systems in Muslim countries.

"In the few countries that have Islamic justice systems, they function no better or no worse than the American justice system. I think it is inhumane to lock people up for decades, for whom there is no hope of rehabilitation."

For McCloud, discrimination against Muslims in the U.S. is a priority justice issue.

"There were hundreds of instances of assaults against Muslim women after the Oklahoma bombing, and a persistence in identifying the culprit as Muslim, even when it was known to be someone else. After the Iranian revolution, Muslim women were accosted and beaten.

"There is a refusal to acknowledge American Muslims as American citizens with the same rights and obligations that accrue to the rest of Americans. They have to live and raise their children in an atmosphere of attacks on all levels. In schools, teachers refuse to call them by their names, demand that they take off their scarves in classrooms, and read from textbooks which denigrate Islam. At work, they get docked for their holidays."



James Morris

"The word 'Islam' means 'surrender to peace,' the loss of our own will in surrender to the divine will."

— James Morris

In this atmosphere, she says, an issue like abortion rights is not a high priority.

While McCloud is distressed at "the singular focus on taking away the power of an individual agent to make decisions," she says that Muslim women tend to see the abortion rights controversy as "a Christian and Jewish issue."

"Islamic law says you should not sacrifice the mother for the sake of the unborn child. But because there is not a total moral breakdown, Muslim women don't see themselves as having to regulate their sex lives with abortion. When you're sitting in a group of Christian and Jewish women wishing to commit genocide on the Muslim community, abortion is far down on the list of concerns. To say their issue with abortion rights must become our issue is ludicrous."

McCloud stresses that customs which appear sexist may not always be experienced in that way.

"Gender separation can permit a kind of social interaction that doesn't normally happen in a mixed setting," she says. "It is an advantage for women to get together to pray or have discussion groups.

"African-American Muslim women have always been workers. For some, it is a welcome release to be married to a man who takes on the burden of responsibility.

"Islam has a complex history of very many cultures, so cultural-social hierarchies get embedded in the understanding of Islam. Some practitioners of Islam are repressive toward women. But the religion itself does not express that."

Jim Morris

Jim Morris, a Muslim professor of religion at Oberlin College and a translator of Islamic spiritual texts, was drawn to Islam as a college student by Persian mystical poetry in which he found "universality, spiritual emphasis and depth." He speaks of "the practice of the divine presence," quoting the Prophet's counsel to worship God "as though you can see

Him, and even if you do not, to know that He sees you." To those who would like a better understanding of Islam, he recommends the poetry of Ibn Arabi, Attar and Rumi.

Morris stresses the importance of looking at the whole tradition, rather than simply its most vocal current spokespersons. Even in countries ruled by right-wing Islamic governments, he says, there is much diversity of thought.

"If you came into our society as an outsider, the first area in which you would see religion brought up is the religious right," he points out. "Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson are the exact analogues of Islamic religious movements in places like Saudi Arabia. That particular version doesn't represent one percent of the total history of Muslim culture."

The fact that it is the version most Westerners are familiar with is due in part to the predominance of well-to-do professionals among Muslim immigrants, Morris says.

"In the U.S., it is very difficult to meet Muslims from more traditional, less educated classes. You meet doctors, engineers, and business people, many of whom have caught on to a religious vision that is not unlike the right-wing mix of religion and politics in the U.S. They have little or no knowledge of the Islamic humanities, and tend to give the same kind of simplistic answers our own politicians are given to — which don't reflect historical points of view or the views of the underclass."

There is also a "natural immigrant conservatism" which seeks to preserve cultural identity, Morris says.

"Issues like women's position in society are tied into agrarian cultures, and it takes awhile to adjust to modern American society."

Morris speaks of "the inversion of the role of the media" in perpetuating misunderstandings about Islam.

"One of the impressions the media give is the military aftermath of colonialization. If you look closely, what you are seeing is not Islam, but injustices left over from the colonial period."

Also, he says, the media tend to focus on variants of Islam which are "exciting in their extremism.

"Take the highly politicized points of view of Louis Farrakhan. The vast majority of American Muslims, be they African-American or immigrant, not only strongly disagree with his basic understanding of Islam, but generally tend to disagree with the political positions with which he is affiliated."

Islam has historically developed "a variety of approaches to questions of justice and questions of violence," Morris says. "Some you might want to label pacifist. The word 'Islam' means 'surrender to peace,' the loss of our own will in surrender to the divine will."

"The critique of the angels"

According to a Qur'anic story quoted in a Muslim Peace Fellowship brochure, the angels objected to Allah's plan to create human beings, asking, "Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?" Allah replied: "I know what you know not."

"We are concerned that the critique of the angels should not be justified in us," the Peace Fellowship literature explains. It is a concern which many of us, Muslim or not, wholeheartedly share. TW

Short Takes

Big Brother

Redwood City, Calif. — ...[I]n 1996, American law enforcement is watching you, and listening, using advanced technology to record what goes on in entire city blocks.

Since late December, the police in this bayside suburb of San Francisco have hidden sophisticated listening devices throughout a section of the city that has been plagued by gang shootings and random gunfire.

The listening system of the Redwood City Police Department is designed to detect gunfire, send a signal back to headquarters, then locate the shots within 10 yards of where they were fired.

As part of a Federal grant, a similar system may soon be installed in Washington or another major city.

In Baltimore, the police wired a 16-block area of downtown with enough video cameras to allow them to monitor every street, sidewalk and alley 24 hours a day. The system watches — and records — everything.

...[T]he Redwood City police say they could, with minor adjustments, focus their sensors on conversation inside houses instead of merely picking up high-decibel gunfire in public areas.

[But] the acoustic sensors are welcomed in the neighborhood where they have been installed.

"It's a great idea — long overdue," said Gregory Luis, a school bus driver.

The New York Times, 2/7/96

Bosnian Work Camps

The Fellowship of Reconciliation is organizing work camps in two Bosnian cities, Bihac and Banjaluka, this June 29 through July 16. Each work camp will be composed of 8-12 participants from the U.S. plus Bosnians from the two cities. The program is designed to give U.S. citizens first-hand, in-depth exposure to the people on several sides of the conflict and to provide some help in repairing the destruction caused by the war.

Cost is $2,000, including all expenses from New York to Bosnia and return. Contact FOR, Box 271, Nyack, N.Y. 10960.

Looking for a new standard of common worship

by Marge Christie

Anglican unity will find its liturgical expression not so much in uniform texts as in a common approach to eucharistic celebration and a structure which will ensure a balance of word, prayer and sacrament.

— consultation of Anglican liturgists in September of 1995

These words were music to the ears of the Diocese of Newark's Task Force on Prayer Book Revision, a group created to confront the philosophy and theology of the language of worship — and to devise ways in which to influence the "rationale and timetable" for prayer book revision now being developed by the national church's Standing Liturgical Commission. Only the General Convention, based on recommendations from the SLC, can revise the prayer book. But dioceses and individuals can try to influence and "nudge" the process along.

After much spirited discussion, our Newark task force has concluded that the primary theological issue in prayer book revision is whether the church's prayer book upholds a spirit of inclusivity — whether everything said and done in worship is inclusive of both God and all of God's people.

As preparation for its work, the task force circulated a questionnaire among all of the 130 congregations of the diocese. Its aim was to learn what was already happening throughout the diocese: who had liturgical committees; who was preparing worship booklets and how often; whether liturgies reflected racial diversity; whether prayers were sensitive to the needs of both youngsters and oldsters; how various seasons are handled; who prays the collect for purity; what hymnals are used; whether choir members are volunteer or paid; what Scripture translations are used; whether contemporary readings, drama, dance and non-organ music are employed on a regular basis; how are the Psalms prayed; whether special eucharistic prayers have been written; whether congregations kneel or stand for the prayers of consecration and for communion.

Once tabulated, the answers to that long list of questions will give vital information about practices already occurring throughout the diocese.

The task force is preparing a variety of experimental liturgies reflecting a theology of inclusiveness. More than 30 churches representing urban, suburban, rural, ethnic and blue collar congregations — with memberships ranging from 50 communicants to 500 — have volunteered to use these liturgies on six consecutive Sundays next fall. They have agreed to use the liturgies at all services in order to assure that the evaluations will reflect the opinions of a whole congregation. A summary of "user" responses will be prepared for the Standing Liturgical Commission and the 1997 General Convention.

We here in Newark believe that the philosophy of inclusiveness should be expanded to embrace more than just liturgical language — although the gender-exclusive language of the current prayer book adopted in 1979 is a clear problem. When the church gathers for worship, the language it uses should no longer deny the existence of half its members or limit God's voice and image, but neither should it overlook the ways in which members of different cultures find expression. Because they reflect the theology of modern times, contemporary readings can be an important and inspiring addition. Suggestions for such readings will be included along with the materials sent to all testing congregations, as will a listing of acceptable hymns, since the 1982 Hymnal also leaves a lot to be desired in the arena of inclusiveness.

A task force subcommittee is also looking at the feasibility of recommending that the next authorized book be in looseleaf form and/or on CD-ROM. While there are many parishioners who will continue to treasure the ability to hold their *Book of Common Prayer* in their hands, there are many others who covet the possibility of experiencing the broad range of liturgical language which can not be contained in a single book. Why not be able to "pull down" specific prayers for specific occasions? And print out an order of service tailored to the congregation and its requirements? In the 1979 prayer book there are two choices for the Lord's Prayer; our research has turned up at least a half dozen others, some of which have the potential of touching the worshipper's heart far more deeply than the familiar ones. A "book" which offers such a wide variety can enrich the worship life of the community in very special ways.

[**Ed. note:** A few other dioceses have expressed interest in joining the Newark liturgical experiment next fall and have agreed to find at least five congregations willing to participate. Others are needed, Christie says, noting that the broader the base, the more credible the results. Contact the Task Force on Prayer Book Revision at 24 Rector Street, Newark, NJ 07102, for materials and instructions.]

Marge Christie is chair of the Diocese of Newark's Task Force on Prayer Book Revision.

Ramadan in Palestine

by Dick Doughty

[Ed. note: Dick Doughty, son of longtime Witness *subscriber Dee Doughty and an award-winning photographer, along with Mohammed El Aydi, is author of* Gaza: Legacy of Occupation—A Photographer's Journey (*Kumarian Press, West Hartford, Conn., 1995, $15.95). The following excerpts are taken from the preface and a chapter on the observance of Ramadan in the Gaza Strip.]*

It was over an Egyptian pizza in 1989 I learned of Canada Camp. I was a month into my first job in the Middle East, as a photojournalist for *Cairo Today* magazine. "It's the only Palestinian refugee camp in Egypt," explained my companion, a freelance reporter. "It's 5,000 people who were told they'd go back to the Gaza Strip after Camp David, but they were tricked. They're stuck on the Egyptian side of the border. Now there's an agreement to let back a few dozen families at a time over 10 or 12 years. This makes them the only Palestinians ever allowed back into Israeli-occupied territory as a community. Want to shoot it?"

Even before the injustice of Canada Camp's predicament sank in, I recall asking myself, "Who, given the choice, would move *into* the Gaza Strip?" Images flew by in my mind of teeming refugee camps, sewers like open sores, shouting men masked in checkered scarves, stones flying and Israeli soldiers shooting: *intifada* — the Palestinian uprising, literally, "shaking off," against Israeli occupation then two years old — the Gaza Strip of my hometown six o'clock news. "Sure," I said, curious.

The next day, eight bus hours northeast of Cairo, we found Canada Camp pounded under July's hammer sun. Our hosts plied us with endless glasses of tea. Talk here was of schools, of work and the lack of it, and of wanting — passionately — to go back to the Gaza Strip. "It's not home," one man said, "but it's Palestine."

We were shown The Calling Wall, or *el silik*, "the wire," as residents say, at the edge of Canada Camp. Here, on either side of the international border, stood people. Families have met here to yell across razor wire and no-man's-land since 1982. I never forgot the faces, nor the hands, reaching.

When I returned to the U.S. six months later, I found through research that the media picture of the Gaza Strip was indeed, at the time, much as I had thought over that Cairo pizza: a sinkhole of poverty, a wellspring of irrational hatred, a netherworld where life is either unimaginable or just pathetic.

Yet now, six years later, these Gazan lives have become central to the future of the entire region. One in eight of the world's 6.5 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip. Under the Palestinian Authority born of the 1993 Declaration of Principles, the Gaza Strip has become a proving ground for the uncertain future of Palestine.

In 1992 I returned to Canada Camp planning to portray Gazan life as experienced by the camp's few repatriated families. Arrangements came slowly. Trust preceded efficiency at every step. I had to work exclusively among Palestinians. Under the occupation — and particularly since the *intifada* — the Gaza Strip was in *halat harb*, a condition of war. Israeli contacts of any kind were unsafe for both myself and my hosts.

Life under Israeli occupation was exhausting and traumatic. Much of what I saw and heard and felt could not be photographed, sometimes for reasons of occupation, sometimes for reasons of Gazan culture. Increasingly I relied on written notes. Within weeks, I began to sense the seeds of a different story, one that would prove more telling of daily Gazan life: a personal account of what happens along the way to doing — or trying to do — a photojournalist's job. In this book I've distilled my experiences from among both Canada Camp residents and others from January to April 1993, months that now are being remembered as a particularly hard time, but a time, too, that is crucial to understand if one is to also begin understanding the immensely complex present.

From the day we met in 1992, Mohammed El Aydi's role as host, guide, cultural consultant and, more than anything, unflagging and buoyant friend, proved so determinative at every stage of this book that he has been, all along, a coauthor.

Ramadan

From minarets, watchers of the skies carried news to the Muslim world last night: the new moon gave way to the first brilliant trace of its waxing crescent. The ninth month of our year, 1,414 years since Prophet Mohammed made his

Bishops H. Coleman McGehee and R. Stewart Wood, of Michigan, met with President Yassar Arafat in Gaza in January following the consecration of Riah Abu el-Assal. McGehee commented that he was impressed by Arafat's commitment to the peace process.

epochal flight from Mecca to Medina, has begun. Amidst the sullen decrepitude of the Egyptian border terminal, a tinselly garland tacked to a wall spells "*ramadan mabruk*," "blessed Ramadan." The mood is upbeat.

Ramadan is about purification. For the next 28 days there will be no food, drink, smoking, sex or unkind words from sunrise to sundown. As if to offset this deprivation, feasting and visiting is encouraged in the evening, making Ramadan the favorite month of the year for many. In the Gaza Strip, the hated night curfew has cut every Ramadan party short for five years. Among the young, angry and religious, the ideal of purification is often taken to also mean the liberation of stolen land. Furthermore, it is well known that the Muslim who falls fighting for honor or land while fasting achieves the highest of martyrs' ranks. Mohammed's explanation of this had been a warning: expect confrontations during Ramadan.

But today, nothing could feel more distant or implausible. Groves of low almond trees sprout frostings of delicate white flowers. In wide fields, men heft basketball-sized cabbages onto horse-drawn carts. The air fairly tingles. I crank down the window and breathe for the sheer pleasure of it. The army checkpoints at Muraj, Kfar Darom and Netzarim are open. Occupation weights lightly on this late February day, as if to tease at some unreal, bygone era.

At Mohammed's house in Khan Yunis Camp, I walk through the corrugated-metal pantry through the back door into a party. An enormous *iftar*, the fast-breaking dinner, is under way on the floor of the small television room: piles of tiny fried fish, rice, tomato sauce, hummus, cheese and fresh orange juice.

Mohammed rises to greet me, beaming, announcing, "Tonight we have three celebrations: one is Ramadan, two is your safe return from Egypt, and three — I have today received the news about my scholarship in Britain." Of several dozen overseas scholarships offered to Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the handful of British Council advanced degree awards are among the most prized. He'll start the one-year program in September, he says, directing me to the mat where four-year-old Sherif is poised to drape a sloppy hug around my neck. Ibtisam and the kids will stay behind, he adds. I tighten my face in concern.

"You know this is our experience as a people," he replies, dimming his enthusiasm into pragmatism. "Many men must leave their families for some time, to get work or training. It is our life here. It is not our choice, but it is the only way now to get a good education. Certainly there is nothing in Gaza."

In the morning, men on the street ask me if I am fasting, often with a twinkle in their eye. I'm trying it today, so yes, I say, and they smile. But by the time I meet Mohammed I feel dull. Ramadan days, especially in the first week, can be psychological black holes, grinding expanses of hours lived in low gear, back up to full speed only with the *athaan*, or call to prayer that begins the *iftar*.

Ramadan days, especially in the first week, can be psychological black holes, grinding expanses of hours lived in low gear, back up to full speed only with the athaan, *or call to prayer that begins the* iftar.

By the time Mohammed and I reach Tel el Sultan, Mohammed is shuffling, almost stumbling along one of Canada Camp's sandy streets, his eyes like slits. I may feel listless, but I'm not a two-pack-a-day smoker. "It's these first days that are so hard," Mohammed says, trying not to complain. I'm not sure we're in shape to pay visits. Who would be in shape to receive us?

Three *shabab* wave like dots from beneath an umbrella stuck into the open sand beyond the camp. Two long, warehouse-like buildings of an Israeli settlement rise in the distance. Walking in the sand, I'm suddenly much hungrier, yawning and craving a nap, right here in the soft, sun-warmed sand.

The guys under the umbrella are no better off. Talk is limp and aimless. One man walks me to another dune overlooking the Jewish settlers' road.

"Don't take your camera, " advises Mohammed. "Someone might see you and begin shooting. You never know."

I ask my escort if kids ever come to this place to — and I make a motion of throwing a stone.

"No, not here," he replies. "But sometimes when there is a strike, the Jewish bosses come down this road and the workers climb over this dune to meet them and go to work in Israel." General strikes of one or more days are called by Palestinian factions, sometimes separately, sometimes in coaltion, to commemorate dates in Palestinian history, and also to protest individual actions of the army and Civil Administration.

"Really? They break the strike by coming here?"

"Yes, it is officially forbidden by the *intifada*, but sometimes people understand a family needs money, needs the work so badly, the *shabab* pretend they don't see the workers coming here from all over Tel el Sultan and Rafah."

Only when we return to Khan Yunis, with the *athaan* just minutes away, does our energy pick up. We walk quickly now, weaving through the market packed shoulder-to-shoulder with men — they do the Ramadan shopping mostly — and dropping into a sweets shop where Mohammed buys a bag of something and I pick up a carton of candy bars for the kids. Ramadan is treat month. We reach the back door just as the call spreads over the camp like a magic wand, Cinderella's midnight in reverse. The streets go empty and 75,000 people in Khan Yunis sit down and eat at precisely the same minute, and in every other town and every other camp it is exactly the same.

Daniel Berrigan

Daniel Berrigan, a Jesuit priest, poet and longtime leader in the peace movement, will turn 75 on May 9, 1996.

In May of 1968, Berrigan and eight others burned draft files with homemade napalm in Catonsville, Md., to protest the war in Vietnam. After he was found guilty, he declined to turn himself in to serve his prison sentence, instead disappearing underground. For four months he eluded the FBI, writing against the war and surfacing occasionally to speak in public, before his eventual capture at the home of William Stringfellow on Block Island.

After 18 months at Danbury Federal Prison in Connecticut, Berrigan was released. Shortly afterwards, he joined others in a second draft board raid in Harrisburg, Penn.

Following the war, Berrigan increased his outcry against U.S. nuclear policy. He has been arrested and jailed repeatedly for acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. In 1980 he initiated the first of a series of "plowshares" actions when he and seven friends entered the General Electric plant in King of Prussia, Penn., and hammered on missle nosecones. Berrigan has also spoken out against abortion, the death penalty, racism and oppression of women and gay people.

The author of some 40 volumes of poetry, journals, and biblical and political commentary, Berrigan has collaborated on books with Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh and child psychiatrist Robert Coles.

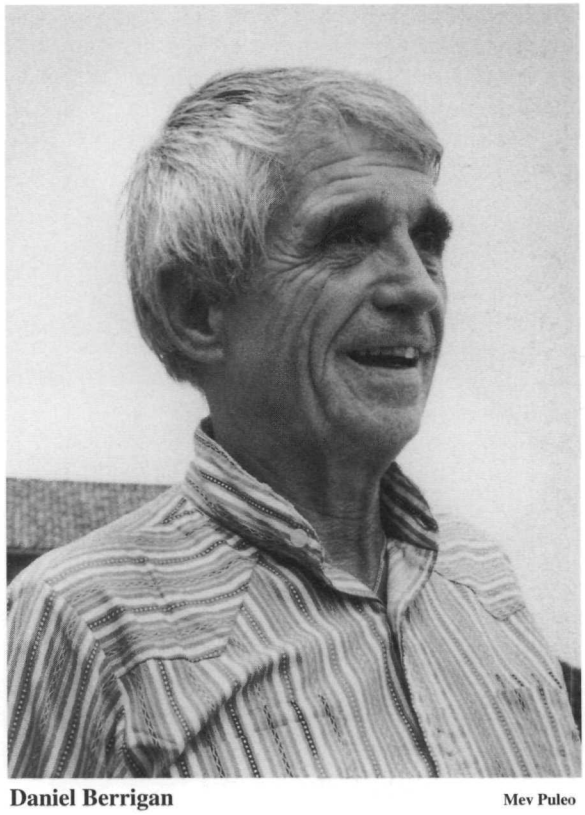
For many years he has worked with people dying of AIDS in a New York City hospice.

Celebrating 75 years

by Bill Wylie-Kellermann

In 1972 I was a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The antiwar and civil rights movements had already left their impression on my young politics. I was, to be sure, a seminarian, but expected to emerge some sort of community organizer with "a theological perspective." Frankly, much of what I believed was little more than sociology.

I recall at the time a course in the Passion of Christ from an eminent scholar. We were treated, among other historically critical data, to the latest in archeological evidence for the method of crucifixion, how the ankles would be turned and the nails driven, the excruciating mechanics of death. The accuracy was impeccable, but the passion was at a safe remove: past tense and lukewarm.



Daniel Berrigan Mev Puleo

As providence would have it (from my perspective like an intervention of the Word) Dan Berrigan just then walked out of Danbury Prison, where he'd done time in consequence of the 1968 Catonsville action, and into that Upper West Side academic fortress. With him came the scent of prison. The smells of the charnel house, of napalm and tiger cage tortures, were also in the wind. He stood before us and read the news with Jacques Ellul in one hand and the Revelation of John in the other. We recognized the passion. Present tense afire.

Never had I met any one who took The Book with such life and death seriousness. Who thought in its own idiom. Who read it from the inside out. Who expected to find therein the powers of this world demythologized and exposed; and who took recourse to the scriptures in hopes of imagining the real world. Who thereby resisted the former and bet his life on the latter.

I got knocked off my horse. A tidy worldview crumbled. I do not exaggerate: I was struck dumb and wandered the

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Bill Wylie-Kellermann is a Methodist pastor and author of *Seasons of Faith and Conscience* (Orbis, 1991). Photographer **Mev Puleo's** work is presented in *Apostle of Peace*, ed. John Dear (Orbis, 1996).

seminary for a time more than a little lost. Berrigan noticed and one day called my name down a long basement hallway. Would I come up for Irish coffee? By and by: Did I pray? Or read the Bible for any reason but a paper assigned? Had I ever seen these books: Merton on the Desert Fathers or Dorothy Day on the Long Loneliness? What signposts in the landscape did I follow? I took up the questions, like signposts in the landscape, and made them my own.

I have seen him do this with others since, some virtually in the grip of despair or death. Don't die, he would say. Come along, we need you. Don't be a conscious integer in the empire's spiritual body count. He made it seem as if resurrection and discipleship were synonyms.

His most recent book, *Minor Prophets, Major Themes* bears consideration. To begin with, the book has a modern day context: Yet another war is in the air with its ever perfected mechanics of death: now cruise missiles, fuel air bombs, laser guided etceteras. Their shadows cross the page. Their victims cry out. Who would have thought that meditating on Haggai or Zechariah during the Persian Gulf War could preserve one's moral sanity? Yet that is precisely Berrigan's claim.

The minor prophets were almost exclusively word prophets, but Berrigan's commentary is shot through with present day deeds — at Pentagon and nuclear installations, in the streets and on the road of return with Salvadoran campesinos. Across the time, by grounded imagination and faith, the words and the deed, the text and community, illuminate one another.

Berrigan's work is stunning in its ability to evoke the humanity of the prophets. He reads the Word as their struggle with conscience, their burning tears, their prayer and choice. And in such wise, their humanity provokes our own. A conversation begins. Having heard them in their full humanness (with all the foibles and confusions, blind spots and shortfalls entailed) Berrigan claims a freedom to respond, to disagree and criticize, even to call these mentors to account before community and our God. Do they challenge our lives and hearts? Yes. But if we're truly in this thing together, then let us push back. Their sexism comes to mind, with Hosea a flaming exemplar. Has he reduced his wife Gomer to a theological metaphor? Berrigan names this nothing less than abuse, and turns things back on the prophet imagining a Book of Gomer which gives the silent nobody a voice. Is Hosea thereby written off and out? By no means. But in his exposure we are all made the better.

Berrigan asked: Did I pray? Or read the Bible for any reason but a paper assigned? What signposts in the landscape did I follow?

One matter is a repeated astonishment: that the prophets should be shown so univocal, so collectively relentless in their complaint against empire in all its forms. Does Berrigan inflate or inflict this on the prophets, imposing some politic of his own? Read the texts. They are uncompromising. Perhaps our amazement is evidence against us that the imperial spirit has deafened our ears to these voices for so long.

There is one thing which Berrigan does bring unapologetically to such reflections: the commitment to non-violence. It functions like the plumbline of Amos. He holds it out to us, out to the prophets. Its line goes straight to the heart of earth, straight to the heart of Christ. Of course, beside it empires are crooked and top heavy walls shown ready to collapse. But prophets too may be bent; even their ideas of God might suffer a twist.

Another way of saying this is that the gospels are never far from the page. The One who is the fullness of humanity, a prophet mighty in deed, steps from the wings now and again — not so much to speak as to show his wounds, to look the prophets in the eye and love them.

William Stringfellow used to inveigh against those who labeled Dan Berrigan a prophet (or a poet) in order to write him off, beyond the realm of ordinary people, ordinary responsibility, normative and human action. I suppose it is not unlike the tactic of confining the Word of God only to a sacred book — in order to banish it safely from our scene, as though it were not everywhere and always to be recognized in common history and our lives.

Dan Berrigan turns 75 this month. It's timely to celebrate that he *is*, in fact, both prophet and poet. His biblical theology and interpretation verify those vocations all the moreso. But let none of us thereby be off the hook of mere Christianity's demands, nor fear to recognize, and even partake, the bittersweet Word of God wherever it may be found. TW

Western denial of a progressive, pivotal Islam must end

by Riffat Hassan

[*Riffat Hassan, Professor of Religious Studies and Humanities at the University of Louisville, is a leading Islamic feminist theologian. The following is excerpted from an address she gave at the 1995 U.N. Conference on Women in Beijing.*]

Since the 1970s there has been a growing interest in the West in Islam and Muslims. Much of this interest has been focused, however, on a few subjects such as "Islamic Revival," "Islamic Fundamentalism," "The Salman Rushdie Affair," and "Women in Islam," rather than on understanding the complexity and diversity of "the World of Islam." Not only the choice of subjects, but also the manner in which these subjects have generally been portrayed by Western media or popular literature, calls into question the motivation which underlies the selective Western interest in Islam.

Given the reservoir of negative images associated with Islam and Muslims in the collective unconscious of the West, it is hardly surprising that, since the demise of the Soviet Empire, "the World of Islam" is being seen as the new enemy which is perhaps even more incomprehensible and intractable than the last one. The routine portrayal of Islam as a religion spread by the sword and characterized by "Holy War," and of Muslims as barbarous and backward, frenzied and fanatic, volatile and violent, has led in recent times to an alarming increase in "Muslim-bashing" — verbal, physical as well as psychological — in a number of Western countries. In the midst of so much hatred and aversion toward Islam and Muslims in general, the outpouring of so much sympathy, in and by the West, toward Muslim women appears, at a surface level, to be an amazing contradiction. For are Muslim women also not the victims of Muslim-bashing?

Based on their life experience, most Muslim women who become human rights advocates or activists feel strongly that virtually all Muslim societies discriminate against women from cradle to grave. This leads many to become deeply alienated from Muslim culture. Muslim women often find much support and sympathy in the West so long as they are seen as rebels and deviants with the world of Islam. But many of them begin to realize, sooner or later, that while they have serious difficulties with Muslim culture, they are also not able, for many reasons, to identify with Western, secular culture.

Much attention has been focused, in the Western media and literature, on the sorry plight of Muslim women who are "poor and oppressed" in visible or tangible ways. Hardly any notice has been taken, however, of the profound tragedy and trauma suffered by the self-aware Muslim women of today who are struggling to maintain their religious identity and personal autonomy in the face of the intransigence of Muslim culture, on the one hand, and the imperialism of Western, secular culture, on the other.

Many Western analysts are still unable or unwilling to see Islam as a religion capable of being interpreted in a progressive way or a source of liberation to Muslim peoples.

While the West constantly bemoans what it refers to as the "rise of Islamic fundamentalism," it does not extend significant recognition or support to progressive Muslims who are far more representative of "mainstream" modern Islam than either the conservative Muslims on the right or the "secular" Muslims on the left. Even after the Iranian Revolution and the "Islamization" of an increasing number of Muslim societies, many Western analysts are still unable or unwilling to see Islam as a religion capable of being interpreted in a progressive way or a source of liberation to Muslim peoples. An even deeper problem is their refusal to understand the pivotal role of Islam in the lives of Muslims, the vast majority of whom — in a worldwide community estimated to be over one billion — are believers rather than unbelievers. Compelled by facts of modern history, some social scientists in the West are now beginning to concede that Islam is *one* of the factors which needs to be considered — along with political, economic, ethnic, social and other factors — in planning and development projects.

But Islam is not, in my judgment, simply *one* of the factors which impact on the lives of Muslims. It is *the matrix* in which all other factors are grounded. I do not believe that any viable model of self-actualization can be constructed in Muslim societies for women or men which is outside the framework of normative Islam deriving from Qur'anic teachings and exemplified in the life of the Prophet of Islam. Nor do I believe that any profoundly meaningful or constructive dialogue can take place between "the World of Islam" and "the West" without a proper recognition of what Islam means to millions of Muslims. TW

The mystique of Islam

by Salih M. Harthi

Europe and the Mystique of Islam by Maxime Rodinson (translated from French by Roger Veinus), University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 1991.

Maxime Rodinson is one of the most read French sociologists and students of Islam and the Middle East.

Europe and the Mystique of Islam is an attempt to explore the different images of Islam in the Western mind. The term "Image" Rodinson uses in his book stands for a system or constellation of ideas painting a perception about the other.

The term is somewhat similar to Michel Foucault's term *Episteme*. This Image or *Episteme* is not necessarily a collection of truths, rather it is mostly a system of facts and fantasies designed to serve an ideological purpose.

Europe and the Mystique of Islam is a social history of the images of Muslims and Arabs in the Western intellectual and political culture. What Rodinson tries in his book is to trace the different images of Islam and uncover the ever-changing underlying ideological agendas.

The book was published in French in 1980 on the wake of the Iranian revolution, when Paris was the exile capital of Ayatollah Khomaini before his return to Tehran. During that time the interest in Islam and the Middle East among the Europeans and Americans grew and a negative image of Islam had to be reinforced to mobilize public opinion to be in line with the political program of western powers:

There are many people who are afraid of Islam. It is terribly true that many frightening acts are committed in the name of Islam, but these are not worse than those committed in the name of Christianity, Judaism, freedom, and so on. Islamic people form a part of the world's underprivileged masses. They quite naturally want to improve their situation and will employ any means, right or wrong, to achieve that goal.

This is the fundamental rule of all human nature.

There have been several images of Islam in the European scholarly and popular mind since the 11th century. Each of them served a specific ideological goal. ... The most troubling is maintained by the colonial-imperial ideology. It has to be negative, so much so that any aggressive action by the Western powers is politically, economically and even morally justifiable.

The value of *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* stems from the method the author applies in his attempt to unveil the objective forces creating the image of the *them*, the Muslims or Arabs, in *our* Western mind.

Maxime Rodinson applies the wealth of structuralist and post-structuralist method of studying social history. The reader can discover easily the proximity of this work to Michel Foucault's ironic criticism of the social history of western thought and society.

There have been several images of Islam in the European scholarly and popular mind since the 11th century. Each of them served a specific ideological goal.

The first image was purely theological, intended to unite the Christian ideology through a common enemy, Islam.

The second most significant image was created after the fall of Toledo in Spain when Western scholars discovered the wealth of philosophical and scientific work of the Arabs in Muslim Spain. This image was the most positive one among all, in the mind of European scholars. However, the over-exaggeration of Arab poetry, palaces, gold and male promiscuity was intended to appeal to the "staid Westerner, disturbed by his own sexuality and beset by unconscious sado-masochist tendencies."

The third most troubling image is the one that is still dominant today, constructed and maintained by the colonial-imperial ideology. It is the image that has to be negative, so much so that any aggressive action by the Western powers is politically, economically and even morally justifiable.

Europe and the Mystique of Islam is one of the most objective and informative books available in English today. TW

book review

Salih M. Harthi is a psychologist who supervises the developmental disabilities program at the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services in Dearborn, Mich.

Alysha Swaim Aziz — Tana Moore

"If my daughter becomes an observing Muslim, I will support that. I will support whatever in Islam is best and most liberating to her."
— Lawrence Swaim

Moving in two worlds

by Lawrence Swaim

There is a keen and luminous gentleness about her, this child of two worlds. Her nurturing instincts are so intense they are almost frightening: her consuming interest in animals (she insists that they understand her when she speaks to them), the displaced, the lost. There is an emotional resonance about her that is almost too precocious for a child of six.

At the supermarket we see a little boy walking fast, crying to himself. "He's old enough to take care of himself," I insist, hurrying to complete my shopping.

My daughter will have none of it. "We have to find out," she says firmly, and there is no dissuading her.

We hunt the boy down, and find that he is indeed lost.

"I was *concerned,*" Alysha says later, when the lost boy is reunited with his grandmother. She says it with a certain emphasis, her chin jutting forward.

Alysha Swaim Aziz: My beautiful daughter, child of two worlds, two cultures, two faiths.

Her mother is a Bengali-speaking Muslim woman from Bangladesh. Divorced, with joint custody, we struggle to parent this child, who so mysteriously embodies both our differences and our similarities, our loves and antagonisms, our joint deficits and our still-joined dreams.

We struggle to keep our daughter fluent in Bengali, the language of the people of Bangladesh and West Bengal. (The language of Rabindranath Tagore and the films of Sajijit Ray, the language of dreamers and poets, a Sanskrit-based language from a civilization where the writer is the quintessential culture hero.)

Sartaz Aziz, her mother, is teaching her to pray in Arabic.

Sometimes it seems like Alysha is on a perpetual quest for a magic door back to some lost Eden, some unbroken and perfect world, before all separations, marital and cultural.

At a service for World AIDS Day, a Catholic priest prays for those with AIDS. From somewhere I hear another voice, strange yet familiar. I glance at my daughter, who sits next to me. To my astonishment, she is praying Muslim-style, her small hands cupped in front of her. While we pray in English, she says *sura* after *sura* in pure and mellifluous Arabic, her head bowed reverently.

Outside the church, she murmurs, "Someday I'll discover a medicine that will cure sick people, like Babu." (Her mother's sister does research on genetic codes at Harvard.)

If Alysha decides to become a practicing Muslim, I will have one daughter who is a Jew, the other a Muslim. (My first wife was a Jew, and my adult daughter chose to become an observing Jew.)

How could this happen to a nice Episcopalian boy? ("I believe in ecumenism," says a friend, "but this is ridiculous!")

Witnesses, the quick and the dead

Lawrence Swaim is an author teaching at Pacific Union College in Angwin, Calif. Artist **Tana Moore** lives in Southfield, Mich.

Alysha's mother Sartaz Aziz, descends from the Zamindar families, traditional land-owning aristocrats, who claim descent from Sir Roger Dowla and the Prophet Muhammad. Aziz was raised first in a castle, then in a compound in the Dhanmondi neighborhood of Dacca, surrounded by servants; each of her 12 brothers and sisters had their own private drivers, attendants, servants.

If Alysha ever wanted to live in Bangladesh, she would (as a *Baygum*, or princess) inherit this kind of privilege. She would also be in a position to do enormous good—for the poor, for those without education or health care, for women.

I am not a Muslim myself, and I am certainly aware of the dark side of Islam. But I do not believe that Christians have ever been able to get it right, either. Throughout the centuries the church taught hatred of Jews, of women, of Muslims, of the mentally ill; today the majority of churches still teach hatred of gays and lesbians. The real religion of America is capitalism, and the real object of worship on Sunday morning is not God, but a self-congratulatory middle-class respectability.

Still I am, for better or worse, a professing Christian. With a theology 10 times more liberal than most, but a Christian nonetheless. (The Jesus story is just too compelling, my need for a friend and brother too great.) I love the liturgy, the literature, and the culture of Anglicanism.

But where does that leave me and my daughter?

I read to her from C.S. Lewis' Narnia books, and hear distant echoes of the Crusades: I am disturbed by the Muslim-sounding names of those who would take away the freedom of Narnia, the scimitars they wear, their Arabic-looking dress. Alysha hears only the magic of Aslan, the Lion from beyond the sea, who gives such power to simple English children that they can defeat empires.

What will this rare and beautiful child say to Christians who ask her to believe that all Muslims go to hell?

What will she say to those Muslims who would ask her to believe that women are less than men?

This is the new California, mecca for immigrants, in which the inheritors of a thousand years of conflict struggle to imagine a better world, based on the best hopes of countless contending cultures.

We have no choice. We have to do it.

Otherwise our children will perish, victims of the blind hatred of the Old World and the blind addictive greed of the New.

What I really want, of course, is a daughter who could kneel beside me in the pew of some comfortably liberal Episcopalian church, and read along with me the sweet words of *The Book of Common Prayer* — that would be heaven, I sometimes think.

But there is no heaven on this earth, no Kingdom but what I am willing to help construct. In the end, what is good for my daughter is not what I want, but what she needs. If I witness my Christianity to my daughter, it will come not from what I say, but what I do—from what kind of father I am.

Finally, it will be what my daughter herself finds most important that I will find a way to love and support. If she becomes an observing Muslim, I will support that. I will support whatever in Islam is best and most liberating to her, not in spite of my Christianity, but because of it.

It is what I think Jesus would want me to do, and what I think he would do himself.

That is a mystery, but I believe it is a mystery I must embody, starting here, starting now: here in this new world, this cutting edge of California, this last best dream of America. TW

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— Rosemary Ruether
Garrett-Evangelical
Theological Seminary,
Evanston, Ill.