

NATION OF ISLAM IN USA

Bilalian Muslims' Heroic fight for Freedom

IMAM BEN NUR-UD-DIN

(Imam Ben Nur ud-Din is a zealous young Bilalian Muslim, who has come to study the Holy Quran and acquire knowledge about other aspects of Islam at the Ahmadiyya Centre, Lahore (Pakistan). He delivered a forceful speech on the occasion of the death anniversary of the Founder of Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam at Darus Salam, Lahore on 29th May, 1981. In his speech he gave a brief account of Bilalian Muslims' journey from slavery to freedom. The following is text of the speech.)

I am grateful for the honour you have given to me to speak before such a distinguished gathering. I would first like to thank you for giving me an opportunity to study here and increase my knowledge about Islam. To be able to study the Arabic text of the Holy Quran has been my earnest desire since I embraced Islam twelve years ago. I thank you for helping me to fulfil this desire. However my desire to read the Holy Quran is not confined to its mere recitation, but my earnest desire is to know its true meaning and message for humanity as we believe that Islam is the best guidance for humanity. All praise is due to Allah that we have a religion that is not just a theory or an ideal, but a complete code for human life. In addition we have the practical demonstration of the Quranic teachings in the life of

the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). We have also been blessed with the assurance by Almighty Allah that the Holy Quran will be preserved for all times to come.

Birth of Bilalian Community

No I would like to speak briefly on the Bilalian community in USA and its interaction with Islam. I embraced Islam through the preaching of the late honourable Elijah Muhammad. I was very-impressed by listening and reading about a religion that taught freedom, justice and equality for all people regardless of colour, class or creed. I read the Farewell Address of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), in which he proclaimed that no Arab is superior to a non-Arab nor the non-Arab is

superior to the Arab, nor is the black man superior to the white man nor the white man is superior to the black man. I also read in the Holy Quran where it says : "O Mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you, and God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)". (49:13)

One of the worst crimes in the history of mankind that has been concealed from the eyes of the world is the barbaric treatment given to the so-called negroes in America. He has been robbed completely of his identity. He has been dehumanized and forced to serve his 'master' like an animal for over 400 years. Many books have been written regarding the conditions of slaves. According to one writer, the slave has been reduced to one fifth of an average human being hinting that there was no hope of his redemption. It was the slave's belief in a power greater than man that the slave-master was not able to destroy him. It was his deep love for Almighty God that he was able to free himself from the inhuman conditions. At last the slave-master realized that he was unable to destroy slave's faith in God which was sustaining him through this inhuman ordeal. So the slave-master

tried to infuse Jesus' divinity as a pacifier into the mind of the slave. Complex dogmas of Christianity and its cultural pattern made him more confused and he lost its religion, culture and identity. There is an old spiritual song our parents and grand-parents used to sing when feeling low in spirit : "Give me that old time religion, Give me that old time religion, Give me that old time religion, it is good enough for me." The master tried to completely destroy the individuality and self-respect of the slave.

Through the efforts of Abraham Lincoln, the slaves got their so-called freedom around 1856. This was freedom from physical bondage but the mental bondage and injustices against him continued. It was in the early twenties that the mental shackles of slavery began to weaken when the teachings of Islam were introduced by such great noble men as Mr. Noble Drew Ali and Mr. Marcus Garvey. They were able to put the first crack in the chain of mental slavery. During the early thirties a stranger rose who later on came to be known as Master Fard Muhammad and preached the universal teachings of Islam to the slaves. This mission was vigorously carried on by Honourable Elijah Muhammad and consequently we see the emergence of Nation of Islam in USA whose members now call themselves as Bilalian Muslims. The message of Islam was different from any thing they had ever

heard before. He taught the ex-slaves that they were descendents of people who once ruled the country.

He also demonstrated how all life goes through a stage of darkness before it comes into light. He instilled faith into the hearts that the Bilalian community will rise to the top, just like the cream which rests at the bottom of the milk, but it finds its way to the surface.

We cannot say with certainty from where this man Fard Muhammad came. But he started perhaps the greatest movement of recent times. After preaching for three or four years, he disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared leaving charge of the Nation of Islam to the late honourable Elijah Muhammad. He also gave him the English translation of the Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali. This English translation of the Quran enlightened late honourable Elijah Muhammad and he gradually guided his people into the fold of Islam. And thus a sizeable section of the black people under the guidance of the late honourable Elijah Muhammad grew into the Nation of Islam enjoying a status and individuality of their own and became respectable members of the brotherhood of Islam.

The late Maulana Muhammad Ali, as you all know, was a student and follower of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, founder of Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, who inspired him to do such a wonderful

translation of the Quran. This translation enabled many people to fully understand the universal message of Islam. All praise is due to Allah for showing the light of Islam. We salute Mirza Ghulam Ahmad for initiating the Ahmadiyya Movement whose main aim is to show the truth of Islam to the people in the West. We must fight in this cause with all our might. The greater the odds more determined we must be to achieve the goal. Allah assures us that after difficulties comes ease. The revivalist work started by the late honourable Elijah Muhammad is now being forged ahead by the dynamic leadership of Imam Wallas D. Muhammad. During the last six years under his able leadership the Bilalian community has much progressed. All praise is due to Allah, Who has showered His blessings on this Movement! How dramatic the change which Islamic teachings have brought into the community can be judged from a recent article in the Bilalian News paper on May 5, 1981. It says: The State of Illinois Board of Higher Education on May 5 granted the American Muslim Mission Authority to operate a teacher's College in Illinois. The AMM'S concept of independent education is a continuation and evolution of the independent education policy advocated by the late honourable Elijah Muhammad who led the Nation of Islam.

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accumulate the best in every religion and to surpass it with his teachings? A most important point to remember is that no one ever proposed that the Quran had been "copied" from the Bible until after the Crusades, despite the fact that there had already been a great deal of intercourse between the two communities for centuries!

The Perfect guide

It is obvious therefore that if a certain principle is common to both ISLAM and Christianity, it can only mean that at least that part of the Christian scripture has not been corrupted.

"I had been brought up in the Christian Faith. I had been confirmed and attended Holy Communion. Imagine, if you can, my delight when I discovered that everything I read about ISLAM coincided with my own views and that the teachings of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) answered all my questions. Surah after Surah of the Holy Quran revealed to me the TRUTH, and I gave thanks to God that He had, in His mercy, accepted my surrender." SALIM R. de GREY, an English convert to Islam.

"In my enthusiasm for ISLAM, I began to study all religions, from the most ancient to those of the present day, comparing each with the other, and subjecting them to a very close criticism, and little by little I became convinced that the Muslim worship was the true religion,

and that the Holy Quran contained what every soul mostly requires for its spiritual elevation. How beautiful and simple is a mosque, and how practical must be a pilgrimage to Mecca, where one cannot distinguish rich from poor, they all being equal before the sight of God. I became more and more convinced that no other worship could be compared with the Muslim religion." COUNT EDWARD GIOJA—an Italian convert to ISLAM.

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The evolution of this concept is what motivated the AMM under Imam Muhammad's guidance, to purchase the historic 40 acres Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, N.C.

The American Muslim Mission College aims to educate persons who are capable of thinking clearly, and creatively with a strong commitment to use learning to develop respect for God consciousness in the service of society. I thank you again for this opportunity to speak to you and I pray that Allah may bless you with peace for ever.

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