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Ismail Faruqi: "(T)he gates of significant contribution to it (Western culture) by whatever creative talent they (Muslim immigrants) may possess are forever closed."

SYMPOSIUM

DIMENSIONS OF ISLAM IN NORTH AMERICA

University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
May 29-31, 1980

Evolution of the Moslem Family in North America

by

Abdo A. Elkholy
Professor of Sociology
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois 60115

ISLAMIC IDEALS IN NORTH AMERICA

BY

Isma'il R. al Faruqi

for

"Dimensions of Islam in North America"

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University of Alberta

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behind; and a country and culture ad quem, alien, awesome, superior, admired and desired but not-yet appropriated or mastered, distant and inappropriable. That is why the immigrant's mind remains "immigrant" for at least one generation until the memory of the old country and culture has completely faded away and the new generation has little or no experiential contact with it, whether directly or through their parents, if these have transplanted it into the new country and maintained it in ghetto-like isolation. That is also why the immigrant is necessarily a parasite to the country that adopts him, regardless of his productiveness. Whether such production is physical or professional, the immigrant's labor is an arithmetical addition to the country's production. His contribution merely increases what is already there, even if it consists of pure research in a laboratory or library. That he has fitted himself into it is the assumption of his employment, and the guarantee of his success. The immigrant's adjustment to his adoptive country and culture signifies his recognition of and acquiescence to the latter's superiority. The immigrant may be able to invent a new tool or machine, discover new facts, or originate a new way of doing things or solving problems. But as to ability to turn the country and its culture to a radically new orientation, and hence to the exploration of horizons genuinely new, the immigrant has none. Ex hypothesi he is devoid of other horizons, incapable of rising above the country and its culture to a vantage point from which to see other horizons. For, as immigrant, he is of the old country though presently not from it; from the new country though not quite of it. The adoptive country accepts him with its hopes pinned on his children; or better, grandchildren. In himself, he is a liability; at best, mere material or instrument for its own predetermined march.

Is this what the Muslim immigrants are? Many of them indeed are precisely that. Their country needs not bemoan their forsaking it; and their culture is not one iota the poorer because of their loss. On the other hand, North America has no reason to celebrate their immigration. Their contribution--nay, existence within its boundaries--is but a

matter of statistics. Western culture has no reason to rejoice at their joining its camp because, incapable of critical outlook of it as a totality--however they may find some of its details annoying--the gates of significant contribution to it by whatever creative talent they may possess are forever closed.

2. Awakening through Fire: It is otherwise with other Muslim immigrants who may have come in as immigrants in search of Western knowledge, professional advancement, or well being, but who awoke in this process to a fuller recognition of Islam, their religion and cultural tradition. It is immaterial that their awakening has come late in life, or that it has come only at the challenge of the new culture. It takes a rubbing stone to prove the gold present in a piece of ore; but that does not change its golden nature, nor its golden capacity to shine forth with proper prophylaxis. Once the Islamic vision is recaptured, a radically new outlook on one's life, one's emigration, on the new world and one's role in it, is obtained. How does Islamic consciousness achieve this?

First, the Islamic vision removes all consciousness of guilt which the immigrant naturally feels at having emigrated and, as it were, forsaken the country of his birth. By making him personally responsible for the unfavorable temporal circumstances which led to his decision to emigrate, and blaming him if he suffered their continuation sitting idly by, Allah--May He be glorified--incited him to take his fate into his