

STATEMENT DI402

Islam Grows into a Strong Presence in America

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*We welcome Islam in America. It enriches our country with Islam's teachings of self-discipline, compassion, and commitment to family. It deepens America's respect for Muslims here at home and around the world.*¹

*Today, Muslim Americans are a cornerstone of our American community. They enrich our political and cultural life; they provide leadership in every field of human endeavor, from business to medicine, to scholarship.*²

These public pronouncements of President Clinton to Muslim Americans are indicative of how Islam has become established as a major religion in America. For most of America's history, Islam had been a marginal presence. Muslims were mostly foreign nationals or resident aliens, with only a few naturalized United States citizens, and even fewer second or third generation Americans. Christian churches relegated evangelism of Muslims to foreign missions. The typical American Christian rarely, if ever, encountered a religiously active Muslim. Now, however, Islam is a noticeable religious force in America. Christians need to be as knowledgeable of Islam's presence as they are of any other religion in America.

Islam is no passing fad, and it is growing quickly in America. American Muslim leaders are quite open about their hopes and dreams. In an editorial entitled "Time to Make an Imprint," Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi writes: "North America needs our contribution, and it is up to us to make an imprint in founding a truly Islamic civilization on this continent."³

Very few Americans lack an opinion about Islam. There are numerous views concerning the religion, many not favorable. "According to a recent Roper Poll, 50% of those polled believed all Muslims to be inherently anti-American. Today, the bywords of the relationship between the Muslim and the Judeo-Christian worlds are alienation and suspicion."⁴ Carl Ellis, a noted African-American Christian leader, asserts that Islam "is the most serious threat to the church in America."⁵

Muslim Influence. Just how influential is the Islamic community in America? Since September 1999, Muslims have conducted Friday congregational prayers inside the U.S. Capitol building. *American* Muslim opposition to a Burger King restaurant opened in the West Bank in Israel caused the corporation to close it down. The United States military has tripled the number of Muslim chaplains in its ranks (serving more than 4,000 Muslim members of the military). *Amazon.com* changed a video review (of the movie *Not without My Daughter*) in response to Muslim complaints.⁶ In 1999 Georgetown University began a three-year project "to document the impact of Muslim Americans on the American horizon."⁷

Islamic Horizons, one of the most influential Muslim journals in America with a distribution of more than 60,000,⁸ asserted in the article "Why Muslim Americans Need to Vote" that "Muslim Americans have power and its accompanying responsibility. We represent \$75 billion of collective annual income, more than any Muslim country can produce."⁹ This same issue relates how Muslim American complaints about a CNN online posting referring to Jerusalem as "the capital of Israel" prompted CNN to make appropriate changes quickly.¹⁰ The growing presence of Muslim Americans has not been lost on politicians either. For example, in New Jersey (home to an estimated 400,000 Muslims), former Governor Christine Todd Whitman signed a bill making New Jersey "the first state to enact a law ensuring the authenticity of Halal food."¹¹ Two Muslim Americans made history by delivering the benedictions on the first day of both the Democratic and Republican national conventions this past

year.¹² Also in 2000, Congress called on the United States Postal Service to issue a postal stamp commemorating the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Muslim Population and Growth. Is Islam the fastest growing religion in the world? Is it the fastest growing religion in America? The demographics tell us that the answer is yes to both questions.

Establishing population demographics for Muslims is not easy. Even without completely accurate statistics, we find numerous independent studies in fairly close agreement. Most major studies estimate a worldwide Muslim population for the year 2000 at roughly 1.25 billion people; that is, about one-fifth or 20 percent of the world's population.¹³ In comparison, Christianity is the largest religion in the world with about 33 percent of the world's population.¹⁴

According to most reports, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world.¹⁵ For example, in Europe, according to United Nations statistics, between 1989 and 1998 the Islamic population grew by more than 100 percent (to about 14 million or 2 percent of the population).¹⁶ At the current rate of growth it is estimated that Islam's population by the year 2025 will be 1.9 billion (about 24 percent of the total European population).¹⁷

One of the most common misconceptions or stereotypes Westerners have about Muslims is that most of them are Arabic. "The major sections of Muslim populations are concentrated in Asia and Africa. Muslims are, by and large, people of color."¹⁸ Missiologist Roland Miller relates that more than 68 percent of all Muslims live in Asia and more than 27 percent live in Africa. Indonesia has roughly 15 percent of the world's Muslim population. In South Asia almost one-third of the world's Muslim population live in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India.¹⁹

Just *how* is the Muslim population growing? The growth rate of Islam in Western nations (including the US and Canada) primarily comes through: a high Muslim birth rate and immigration (e.g., Muslims moving to the United States), not from converts (non-Muslims becoming Muslims). As we shall soon note in regard to converts, however, two groups are vulnerable to Muslim evangelism.

*In 1995 there were some 4 million Muslims in France, 1.9 million in Germany, and 1.5 million in the UK, accounting for 7 percent, 2.4 percent, and 2.7 percent of the overall populations respectively. In 1998 7 percent of babies born within the European Union were Muslim, in Brussels it was as much as 57 percent....This growth comes primarily through immigration and a high birth rate.*²⁰

It is difficult to estimate accurately the total number of Muslims in the United States and the rest of North America. Research scientist Carol Stone states that "it is still unclear how many Muslims currently reside in America...because of a lack of reliable information about Muslims in this country."²¹

There are several main reasons why this is so. First, for the past 50 years the United States government (unlike some countries) has not included questions about religious affiliation in its census.²² Dr. James Dretke, executive director of the Zwemer Institute, states that a second factor "is the fact that Muslims do not join mosques as Christians join churches, so it is impossible to count them from membership rolls."²³ Roland Miller gives a third reason: "Religious statistics are notoriously difficult to compile because of affiliation questions and reporting problems. Muslim statisticians routinely give higher figures."²⁴

Nevertheless, both Christian and Muslim sources assert that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States.²⁵ The *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2000* gives the figure of 3,950,000 Muslims in America today.²⁶ *Islamic Horizons* states that there are eight to ten million Muslims in North America.²⁷ The most common figure cited (the statistic the United States government regularly uses) is about six million.²⁸ The largest concentrations of Muslims are in California, New York, and Illinois — with an estimated 400,000 in the Chicago area.²⁹

While specific figures may be debated, what cannot be debated is the phenomenal growth of Islam. According to United Nations statistics, the Muslim population in the United States grew by 25 percent between 1989 and 1998.³⁰ In 1990 there were only about 50 Islamic schools in America. Today the number is over 200.³¹ Since about 1990 the number of "registered Islamic centers and mosques" has tripled to "more than 2,500."³²

Factors for Growth. In the book, *The Muslims of America*, Prof. Yvonne Haddad addresses the main factors in Islam's growth in the U.S.: "The dramatic growth of the Muslim community in the United States is a recent

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phenomenon, taking place primarily over the last three decades in response to changes in American immigration laws and the demands of the labor market.”³³ *Islamic Horizons* echoes this assertion: “The Muslims of North America proudly flaunt the fact that they are a people with a population over eight million and growing... These figures do not, however, highlight the fact that a vast majority of these eight million are Muslims who either came to this continent after the 1960’s or are reverts [i.e., people who return to their former Muslim beliefs].”³⁴

Again, conversion has not been the major factor in Islam’s growth, with two major exceptions. The first is given by Wendy Zoba in a *Christianity Today* cover story entitled “Islam, U.S.A”: “Islam is gaining most of its U.S. converts in prisons and on university campuses. The majority of American converts to Islam — 85 to 90 percent — are black.”³⁵ In addition, the number of American women who marry Muslim men and convert is estimated to be about 7000 per year.³⁶

African-Americans make up an estimated 42 to 45 percent of the Muslims in America.³⁷ Carl Ellis places the actual number of African-American Muslims at 2.6 million. Of these, only 18,000 to 20,000 are members of Louis Farrakhan’s organization, the Nation of Islam.³⁸

Christians may wish they could say that Islam and Christianity were two complementary faiths; two alternate paths to salvation. In reality, their foundational teachings are diametrically opposed.³⁹ For Muslims “it is an article of faith that Islam is guidance for humanity,”⁴⁰ and they are commanded to do all they can to spread their faith. Islam denies the Trinity, the deity of Christ, his death on the cross for our sins, and salvation by grace.

James Dretke expresses the Christian attitude very well: “For Christians who take seriously Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20, it is a great thrill to see so many Muslims on our doorsteps. While we cannot easily gain entry into their countries... God has brought them to ours.”⁴¹

— Joseph P. Gudel

NOTES

- 1 Pres. Bill Clinton, “Annual Ramadan Message,” The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 22 November 2000.
- 2 Pres. Bill Clinton in “Clinton Hosts Eid Reception,” *Islamic Horizons*, January–February 1420/2000, 16. 1420 in the dating of the publication is based on the Muslim calendar, which dates from Muhammad’s “Flight” (HIJRAH) from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina).
- 3 Muzammil H. Siddiqi, “Time to Make an Imprint,” *Islamic Horizons*, September–October 1421/2000, 6.
- 4 “TV Series Offers View of Islam,” *Islamic Horizons*, May–June 1421/2000, 13.
- 5 David Neff, “Answering Islam’s Questions,” *Christianity Today*, 3 April 2000, 7.
- 6 “National News,” *Islamic Horizons*, November–December 1420/1999, 12,14; and, in the same issue, Abu Ali Bafaquih, “Muslim American Power Emerges,” 26, 28. *Not Without My Daughter* is the true story of Betty Mahmoody, an American who married an Iranian Muslim, detailing her experiences as a woman in Iran.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 8 “Islamic Horizons Grows,” *Islamic Horizons*, May–June 1421/2000, 8.
- 9 Salam Al-Marayati, “Why Muslim Americans Need to Vote,” *Islamic Horizons*, January–February 1420/2000, 35.
- 10 “Plusses [sic] and Minuses for Muslim Americans,” *Islamic Horizons*, January–February 1420/2000, 37.
- 11 “NJ First to Enforce Halal Laws,” *Islamic Horizons*, September–October 1421/2000, 16. Halal dietary regulations ensure that meats consumed by Muslims are prepared properly, similar to Kosher laws concerning Jewish food.
- 12 Umbreen Abdullah, “Joining the mainstream,” *Islamic Horizons*, November–December 1421/2000, 64.
- 13 Ninian Smart, ed., *Atlas of the World’s Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13; “Religion,” *2000 Britannica Book of the Year* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2000), 292; David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, “Annual Statistical Table of Global Mission: 1999,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 23, no. 1:25; Larry A. Poston with Carl F. Ellis, *The Changing Face of Islam in America* (Camp Hill, PA: Horizon Books, 2000), 67; Muzammil H. Siddiqi, “Did We Live the Ramadan Spirit?” *Islamic Horizons*, January–February 1420/2000, 6; Roland E. Miller, *Muslim Friends* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), 396.

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- 14 Barrett and Johnson, 25; *2000 Britannica Book of the Year*, 292.
- 15 Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 183; Miller, 396–400.
- 16 Wendy Murray Zoba, “Islam, U.S.A.” *Christianity Today*, 3 April 2000, 40.
- 17 J. Dudley Woodberry, “Missiological Issues in the Encounter with Emerging Islam,” from *The World of Islam CD* (Colorado Springs: Global Mapping International, 2000).
- 18 Sami A. Shama, “Islam: The Image Question,” *Islamic Horizons*, March–April 1418/1998, 30.
- 19 Miller, 24–25.
- 20 Survey Of Islam, Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity, from *The World Of Islam CD* (Colorado Springs: Global Mapping International, 2000).
- 21 Carol L. Stone, “Estimate of Muslims Living in America,” in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, ed., *The Muslims of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 25.
- 22 “Largest Religious Groups in the United States of America” (www.Adherents.com), 1.
- 23 James P. Dretke, “The Growth of Islam in the United States,” article awaiting publication, 2000.
- 24 Miller, 33. Muslim authorities often make the same claims concerning Christian statisticians.
- 25 Edward Gilbreath, “How Islam Is Winning Black America,” *Christianity Today*, 3 April 2000, 52–53; Stone, 25; Zoba, 40; Ilyas Ba-yunus, “Unifying Muslim North America,” *Islamic Horizons*, May–June 1421/2000, 20.
- 26 Eileen W. Lindner, ed., “Islam,” *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2000* (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 2000).
- 27 Abu Ali Bafaquih, “Muslim American Power Emerges,” *Islamic Horizons*, November–December 1420/1999, 26; Muzammil H. Siddiqi, “Time to Make an Imprint,” 6.
- 28 Clinton, “Annual Ramadan Message.”
- 29 Poston, 17; Zoba, 48.
- 30 Zoba, 40.
- 31 Karen Keyworth, “Removing Barriers to Excellence,” *Islamic Horizons*, May–June 1421/2000, 28; Muzammil H. Siddiqi, “Taking Charge,” *Islamic Horizons*, May–June 1421/2000, 6.
- 32 Ba-Yunus, 20; Dretke, 1.
- 33 Haddad, “Introduction: The Muslims of America,” 4.
- 34 Muzammil H. Siddiqi, “Learning from History,” *Islamic Horizons*, March–April 1418/1998, 6. It is conservatively estimated there are about 35,000 Muslim immigrants yearly. (Poston, 16, 33.)
- 35 Zoba, 42.
- 36 Dretke, 4. According to Dretke, this statistic is mitigated by the fact that many of these women revert back to their Christian roots when their children get older (i.e., above 7 or 8 years old). Also, cf., Zoba, 42.
- 37 Further references include, Joseph P. Gudel, “Hate Begotten of Hate,” *Forward*, Fall 1986, 9–11, 23–25; Poston with Ellis, 109–66; 247–61; Gilbreath, 52–53. Azim Nizamuddin, “What Muslims Can Offer America,” *Islamic Horizons*, March–April 1418/1998, 35; Poston, 22.
- 38 Gilbreath, 53. For years orthodox Muslims have denounced Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam as heretical; however, this may have changed last year when Farrakhan claimed to accept orthodox Muslim beliefs, rejecting his previous heretical doctrines and racism. See “The Family Grows: Farrakhan and Nation of Islam Move toward Islam,” *Islamic Horizons*, March–April 1421/2000, 10; Toure Muhammad and Askia Muhammad, “We Are a Family,” *The Final Call: Online* (www.finalcall.com), 15 March 2000; Askia Muhammad and Eric Ture Muhammad, “Savior’s Day 2000 Weekend Brings Many Joyous Surprises,” *The Final Call: Online*, 15 March 2000.
- 39 For more information see Joseph P. Gudel, “Islam’s Worldwide Revival,” *Forward*, Fall 1985, 16–21; Joseph P. Gudel, “To Every Muslim an Answer,” *Forward*, Winter 1986, 21–25; Joseph P. Gudel, “Religious Radicalism: Right or Wrong?” *Christian Research Journal*, Winter–Spring 1990, 16–19.
- 40 Abidullah Ghazi, “Reaching Out with the Guidance for Humanity,” *Islamic Horizons*, September–October 1420/1999, 33.
- 41 Dretke, 5.