



STATEMENT DI-209

EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

Witnessing to the Nation of Islam

by Jerry L. Buckner

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan called for the Million Man March to take place in Washington, D.C., on October 16, 1995, and black men across America responded. The response was so enthusiastic that not even the march on Washington by the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., surpassed the crowds that Farrakhan was able to bring together. Why was the Million Man March so effective? Many saw it as a way the black community could stand together. Moreover, it encouraged black males to stand up and be men in their homes and communities.

The official membership of the Nation of Islam has been estimated to be between 19,000 and 30,000. Others have said they have 60,000 across America. Whatever the case, they have far more influence than their numbers would indicate, as the Million Man March demonstrated.

The Nation of Islam represents a serious threat to the Christian community. The growing presence of the Nation of Islam and their attacks on essential Christian doctrines make it difficult to continue ignoring them. The black church must awake to the challenge. There have been two problems the black church has faced in rising to this challenge: (1) the lack of evangelism in fulfilling its role to the community and (2) the lack of biblical discipleship for church members.

Meanwhile, members of the Nation of Islam have proven themselves to be highly motivated and successful in their outreach efforts in the community. Not only are they encouraging young black males to join the Nation of Islam, but they are also recruiting them from our churches. In addition, they have a strong presence in the jails and prisons. This was how Malcolm X and Mike Tyson were recruited. They are out in the community and on the streets training young black males in their peculiar version of Islam. Should we be afraid of the Islamic threat? No, but we should embrace this opportunity to sharpen our beliefs and strengthen our witness.

BASIC BELIEFS

Many African-Americans, including some Christians, regard the Nation of Islam as a Christian organization that is a positive motivating factor in the black community. A review of their basic beliefs, however, will demonstrate that the Nation of Islam is one of the fastest-growing American cults.

The whole basis of the beliefs or theology of the Nation of Islam is an attempt to answer two major questions: (1) "Who are we as a people?" and (2) "What is sin?" The Nation of Islam denies the essentials of the historic Christian faith. The following list of beliefs includes excerpts from the Nation of Islam's own writings.

Polytheism. The Nation of Islam is a polytheistic religion. Several references in their literature point to a belief in many gods, and there is reference to a council of 24 scientist-gods who write history. One of them acts as God,

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

while the others do the work of getting the future together for the Nation. Black men are themselves referred to as being gods. "You [the black man] are walking around looking for a God to bow to and worship. You are the God!"¹

The Gods Are Not Eternal. According to the Nation of Islam, although the spirit of Allah (God) lives on, the gods are not eternal. "We all know that there was a God in the beginning that created all these things and do know that He does not exist today."²

God Is a Man. They teach that Allah "came to us from the Holy City of Mecca, Arabia, in 1930. He used the name of Wallace D. Fard."³ "God is a man and we just cannot make Him other than man, lest we make Him an inferior one; for man's intelligence has no equal in other than man."⁴

"Yakub Myth." A basic teaching in their belief system is the "Yakub myth." Yakub was one of the council of 24 black scientist-gods. He rebelled against Allah and the council, causing havoc. He created the white race as a race of devils to strike back at the black race. Elijah Muhammad said that black people are not sinners, but that the white man is at fault for their problems.

The Trinity. The Nation of Islam denies the Trinity. "The Christians refer to God as a 'Mystery' and a 'Spirit' and divide Him into thirds. One part they call the Father, another part the Son, and the third part they call the Holy Ghost — which makes the three, one. This is contrary to both nature and mathematics. The law of mathematics will not allow us to put three into one."⁵ "Making the Son and the Holy Ghost the equal with the Father is absolutely sinful."⁶

Deity of Christ. The Nation of Islam rejects the essential Christian doctrine that Jesus is both God and man. Jesus "did not consider himself to be God or a son of God or equal of Him....Jesus was only a man and prophet of Allah."⁷ In a four-hour videotape of Louis Farrakhan's 1994 Easter Service, "The Crucifixion of Jesus: The Imprisonment of Minister Farrakhan," Farrakhan discusses the crucifixion and relates it to himself, saying, "I am hanging on the cross right now. I'm on Calvary right now and the more I suffer, the more our people are raised to consciousness....you don't have to look for Jesus. I represent him. I was born to die for you and I love the thought of dying for you."⁸

The Holy Spirit. The Nation of Islam denies that the Holy Spirit is God. They view the Spirit as a "spook."

The so-called Negroes think of God in terms of something without form (spirit or spook) and they believe that His throne is somewhere in the sky....The teachings of Christianity have put God out of Man into nothing (spirit). Can you imagine God without form but yet interested in our affairs who are the human beings? What glory would an immaterial God get out of a material world? We also learn that a spirit is not self-independent; it is dependent upon air, water and food. Without it, the spirit can have no life. So how can a spirit be God?⁹

The Bible. Although they do make use of it when it does not contradict their own teachings, the Nation of Islam believes the Bible has been tampered with by the white man. "The Bible is now being called the Poison Book by God Himself, and who can deny that it is not poison?...the Book can't be recognized as the pure and Holy Word of God."¹⁰

Atonement and Salvation. The Nation of Islam rejects the essential Christian doctrines of atonement and salvation. "We know we have a Savior. In 1877 a Savior was born [i.e., Wallace Fard]....A Savior is born, not to save the Jews but to save the poor Negro....A Savior has come to save you from sin, not because you are by nature a sinner but because you have followed a sinner."¹¹

The Human Race. As we've seen, the Nation of Islam teaches a racist doctrine that the black race is divine and righteous by nature. They were the creators of the universe, and they are taught they are black gods.

Heaven and Hell. Members of the Nation of Islam do not believe in the hereafter, whether it be heaven or hell. "I have no alternative than to tell you that there is not any life beyond the grave. There is no justice in the sweet bye and bye. Immortality is NOW, HERE."¹² To the Nation of Islam, heaven and hell are regarded as special conditions here on earth now, not as special places to go after death. "The Christians say, 'Confess the Lord Jesus Christ or you (who are other than the Christians) will burn in hell forever.' That hell must not be so hot that one can burn in it forever and never burn up."¹³

The Nation of Islam teaches other anti-Christian doctrines besides those that have been cited above. But the examples we have considered are certainly among the most significant and should be sufficient to acquaint you with

their theology.

WITNESSING TO THE NATION OF ISLAM

African-American Christians and white Christians have different responsibilities in witnessing to the Nation of Islam. Much can be learned from the Nation of Islam itself. If the church can learn the things that attract people to the Nation of Islam, then they will be better able to witness to those in the group. The success of the Nation of Islam is not so much due to what they are doing but to what the church has failed to do.

The Responsibility of Black Churches. The black church today has been passive and impotent in addressing racism as a sin. The church must address racism in the black community; if this is not done, then many black youths will be lost to the Nation of Islam. The reason why the Nation of Islam is extremely appealing to black men is because they address white racism and have a leader, Louis Farrakhan, who boldly defends black racism. The church must address these issues.

The church must develop a strong presence not only in the black community, but also in the jails and prisons — especially ministering to young black men. Jesus warned, "I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me" (Matt. 25:43, NIV).

The church must develop economic empowerment programs for the community. The Nation of Islam has a strong economic base and is very good at providing for the have-nots in our society. They have designed a system of economic education and empowerment for the black community. The church can do more than the Nation of Islam in this area, if Christians all work together. The church can develop economic education programs that will have a dynamic effect on the black community.

The church needs to be involved in the communities and clean them up. The Nation of Islam emphasizes eating better, avoiding drugs, alcohol, and smoking. They work on cleaning up the ghettos and slums by getting rid of drug pushers, prostitutes, and other negative elements in the community. The church can also do these things and more.

The Nation of Islam emphasizes a strong family structure — including fatherhood and black manhood. The church needs to provide mentorship and strong surrogate fatherhood to young black men who are without a good male role model. The church can have Christian black males work with young black males in the community in the areas of developing friendships, providing information, or obtaining jobs while helping them with housing and assisting with their educational activities or endeavors. The church needs to have more youth activities. Much can be done to get youth in the community excited about Christian activities.

The Responsibility of White Churches. It is very difficult for white Christians to approach members of the Nation of Islam in an evangelistic way. This is true because of all of the racism that has taken place. As a reaction to white racism, black racism took form. The Nation of Islam's emergence was a direct response to racism. Nevertheless, even though it is difficult to approach a member of the Nation of Islam, there are things white Christians can do.

White Christians need to take an aggressive stance against racism in America. They need to join hands with the black church to fight against any form of racism, because it is a sin. They need to strategically join together in an evangelistic reconciliation, a Christlike endeavor, in order to break down the barriers of racism. They need to worship together — a black church coming together with a white church, even exchanging pulpits. They can join hands as co-laborers to reach people in the inner cities. The white pastor can preach sermons from the pulpit against racism. Every person who comes to the local church must be received with open arms, no matter what color he or she is.

The white church needs to work with the black church in developing partnerships around mentorship and surrogate fatherhood to black males in the urban cities. One pilot project in Houston serves as an example of successful mentorship. Several white suburban churches joined some urban black churches in an effort to do something about crime in the black community. Their idea was in direct correlation to the fact that most crimes in the black community were committed by young black males who lacked a positive male role model in their lives. The churches provided substitute fathers for many of the fatherless black youths in the city. Results were astounding. Crimes committed by blacks, especially black youths, dropped dramatically. Having a father image made a significant impact upon these black youths.

One thing is certain: We need to develop an agenda for reaching the black community.

Don'ts of Witnessing to the Nation of Islam. Don't try to convince them to get saved through your own strength. Trust the Holy Spirit to convince them to believe in Jesus. If God could save the apostle Paul, He can also save Louis Farrakhan and members of the Nation of Islam.

Don't become hostile with the members of the Nation of Islam. They are not enemies to be conquered. They are fellow human beings for whom Christ died on the cross.

Don't overwhelm them with Scripture. They will not listen if they are overwhelmed.

Don't use a King James Bible because, according to some Muslims, King James himself translated this version and corrupted it. I recommend using the New International Version or the New American Standard Version in witnessing to them. Don't use a Bible in which you have written notes or made marks. This indicates disrespect for the Word of God to members of the Nation of Islam.

Avoid all pictures of God, Jesus, or other biblical personalities as white with blue eyes and blond hair.

Don't use the word "Trinity" because this word often connotes the worship of three gods to the Nation of Islam. You can let them know from the Scriptures that God is indeed one Being, and this one Being exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — three persons.

In dealing with the members of the Nation of Islam, remove all offenses except the cross. They view Christian symbols as offensive.

Do's of Witnessing to the Nation of Islam. Remember your greatest weapon in witnessing is prayer. This is true when witnessing to any cultic group.

Learn to demonstrate love and patience when witnessing. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35, NIV).

Know what you believe and why you believe it regarding the essentials of the historic Christian faith before you even begin witnessing. Know the original even before beginning to attempt to learn about the counterfeit.

All Muslim groups are different. Know which Black Muslim group you are witnessing to. Share the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as God manifested in the flesh with the Nation of Islam members. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). Remind those in the Nation of Islam that according to the Koran, "No true prophet of God can lie." If that's true, since they believe that Jesus is a prophet of God, then Jesus told the truth about being the only truth and way to God.

Let the Nation of Islam members know that true righteousness doesn't come through man's so-called righteousness, but through the righteousness of Christ's perfect life imputed as a free gift to those who believe.

Elijah Muhammad told his followers, "The greatest hindrance to the truth of our people [members of the Nation of Islam] is the preacher of Christianity."¹⁴ My message to you is, Keep on being a hindrance and telling them what is right. Be encouraged! There are many who have come out of the Nation of Islam to become strong Christians in the church.

Dr. Jerry L. Buckner has degrees from California Baptist College, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, and San Francisco Theological Seminary. He is a pastor, counselor, lecturer, and the host of the *Contending for the Faith* radio broadcast on KFAQ AM 1100 in the San Francisco Bay Area.

NOTES

¹Elijah Muhammad, *Our Savior Has Arrived* (Newport News, VA: United Brothers Communications, n.d.), 35.

²Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Philadelphia: House of Knowledge Publications, 1965), 9.

³Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, vol. 1 (Newport News, VA.: The National Newport News and Commentator, 1957), 11.

⁴Muhammad, *Message*, 6.

⁵Muhammad, *Message*, 1.

⁶Muhammad, *Our Savior*, 152.

⁷Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, vol 2 (Hampton, VA: U.B. & U.S. Communications, n.d.), 80.

⁸Videotape of 3 April 1994 Easter message by Louis Farrakhan delivered at Mosque Maryam, Chicago, Illinois, entitled, "The Crucifixion of Jesus: The Imprisonment of Minister Farrakhan."

⁹Muhammad, *Supreme Wisdom*, vol. 2, 9-10.

¹⁰Muhammad, *Message*, 94.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 237.

¹²*Ibid.*, 219.

¹³Muhammad, *Supreme Wisdom*, vol. 2, 42.

¹⁴Muhammad, *Message*, 18.