

The Agha Khan Explains Rise of Islam in America

By Abdul Basit Naeem

Many prominent Islamic personalities — religious and social leaders as well as those occupying high posts in government — in the East, when asked to express their opinion of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and his philosophy or the Islamic movement headed by him, refuse to commit themselves on the subject.

In most cases, their silence is justified and understandable: They know little about the U. S. Islamic scene other than what they might have learned from second or even third-hand sources (such as the generally anti-Islam European news media) and hence cannot offer an honest appraisal. In the remaining cases, they are reluctant to reveal their views for fear of vexing "valuable white friends, academic associates or business colleagues . . ."

ONCE IN A while—caught unawares by a clever news-hound—a prominent Muslim may find it impossible to "dodge" the inevitable question. The best he can do, under the circumstances, is to face the inquirer and produce some sort of an answer. And rare indeed is the instance when an interviewee's reply favors or appears to favor the subject of inquiry, i.e., the Nation of Islam in America.

A definite exception to the

general rule stated above is His Highness Prince Karim Agha Khan IV, descendant of an ancient Iranian Muslim savant and the acknowledged leader of some 20 million Muslims in Africa and Asia, known as the "Ismailis."

While granting an interview recently to Mr. Nicholas Tomalin, a well-known British newsman, he was asked: "Speaking of color prejudice, what do you feel about the new movement of Black Muslims among American Negroes? Is it an aggressively racist movement?"

HIS HIGHNESS, the Agha Khan neither evaded the issue nor felt embarrassed in presenting his English interviewer with a frank and candid reply.

In a way, I might add here, the words uttered by the distinguished Ismaili Muslim leader comprise much more than a simple statement of facts. When examined minutely, we find the Agha Khan's reply—for all its brevity—contains two extremely significant points:

One—it clearly repudiates, in effect, other Muslims who unwittingly criticize the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Two—it explains why Islam would continue to attract and win adherents among the so-called "Negroes" of America.

Here, word for word, is what His Highness Prince Agha Khan IV told his interviewer, Mr. Tomalin (as reported in the "Sunday Times" of London, England, dated December 19, 1965; page 30):

"THAT'S A difficult question. On their religion, we Ismailis have no view; in the (Holy) Koran it very clearly says no Muslim may judge the strength of another Muslim's beliefs. As a political movement, the Black Muslims arose after I left the states. But I think it is growing because Islam is a very equalizing faith, it's a comfort to a group under pressure."



Naeem