

Islam Stirs with New Life in North Africa

Cairo — (RNS) — Roughly every fifth person in the world is a Muslim. Thus Islam is the world's largest organized non-Christian religion. In Africa, where a rivalry is going on between the Cross and the Crescent, Muslims now number 100 million—as compared with 60 million Christians—in a total population of 250 million.

And it is in Africa especially that carefully organized attempts are being made to expand the growth and influence of Islam. This ties in with President Gamal Abdel Nasser's conviction that Egypt's fate is inevitably bound by the African continent.

These are some of the facts which served to heighten interest in the first Pan-Islamic Congress which brought together some 100 ulemas (religious) from 70 countries under the sponsorship of the Higher Council for Islamic Studies.

Made up at present of 17 Egyptian and eight foreign ulemas, the Council is housed at 1,012-year-old Al Azhar University—the Islamic "equivalent" of the Vatican—and has been entrusted with conducting a massive revival of Islamic culture both in Africa and elsewhere, meanwhile keeping it free from any "taints" of sectarianism or political or racial discrimination.

One of the announced primary aims of the congress here, which opened March 6 and was scheduled to continue for a month, was to cope with the pressing need for bringing Islam into harmony with modern conditions of life.

Thus the congress devoted its first two weeks to debates on such topics as birth control, socialism, and various politico-economic systems with a view to deciding whether any essential conflict with Islamic laws are involved.

Whatever decisions are made, they are bound to affect masses of the Islamic poorer classes who have tended to resist modern innovations on the grounds that they are incompatible with their religious outlook.

More important still, the congress is expected to weigh the question of setting up a new supreme controlling body for Islam, whose adherents are claimed to number anywhere from 500 to 750 million.

Until now, Al Azhar has held the supreme place in the Islamic world, making Cairo the undisputed capital. The university is headed by a Grand Sheikh, whose fatwas (religious decisions) are binding on all Muslims.

Alert to the golden opportunity represented by Al Azhar's prestige and influence, Cairo has already inaugurated cultural and training programs among the 100 million African Muslims, since they obviously represented a force capable of building events in Africa provided it is properly coordinated and unified.

To the western mind, the

Dark Continent is predominantly pagan, but figures published by Al Azhar show how basicless this hypothesis is, and how strongly, besides, Muslim penetration is.

According to Al Azhar, four African countries are completely Muslim—Mauritania, Libya, Somalia and Zanzibar, while two—Tunisia and Northern Sudan—are 85 per cent Muslim.

Other areas with overwhelming Muslim percentages are the United Arab Republic, Niger, Morocco, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Portuguese Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Eritrea.

Those with Muslim populations ranging from 15 to 40 per cent include Tanganyika, Southern Sudan, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon, Liberia and Dahomey. The following coun-

tries have Muslim percentages that range from one to ten: Central African Republic, Guinea, Madagascar, Gabon, the two Congoes, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, the Union of South Africa, Mozambique and Rio de Oro.

Programs carried on by the Higher Council for Islamic Affairs, which was created in 1953, are aimed at bringing African Muslims more closely under the flag of Al Azhar, which, in effect, has become their guide in religious, political, economic and cultural matters.

During the first years of its existence, the Council's activities were limited to sending copies of the Koran and other Islamic books and magazines to Muslim communities in the newly independent African countries. It also sent teachers and preachers there with the specific object of propagating Islam. The same program was promoted in Muslim areas in Asia.

It was soon realized, however, that other measures would be necessary. Al Azhar therefore established for the first time in its history a program of technical training for the African Muslims designed to equip them for jobs in agriculture, engineering, animal husbandry, crop conservation and light industrial engineering. The argument put forward in support of this new venture was that by being able physically to help the underdeveloped countries and by showing that Islam cared for the people's material as well as spiritual welfare the Muslim cause would be advanced.

During the past year, the Council's activities have increased considerably. Besides providing books and magazines, a new supply of Islamic literature in Arabic, French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi, Swahili, Lingala, Amharic, Somali, Shilluk and many other African dialects. These works have also been translated into Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Chabuti, Kurdish, Malayan, Indonesian and Si-

amese, all this reflecting the general expansion of Islamic outreach.

The Council has also been responsible for the construction of new mosques and Islamic centers in Africa and Asia. It has begun a program of training African and Asian nationals as preachers and teachers, all of whom will work under the direction of Al Azhar.

For this fiscal year, an independent budget of \$454,000 has been established to extend the Council's work even further. Immediate plans call for the construction of a giant Islamic institute in Cairo for training of African and Asian missionaries. So far, the Council has been responsible for training some 20,000 apprentice missionaries from 70 Afro-Asian countries.

All these activities are being reviewed here by the Pan-Islamic Congress as it seeks to strengthen the influence of Islam in world political, economic and social affairs.

Muslim leaders claim the systematic, long-term program initiated by the Islamic Council Latin America and Africa.

Islamic leaders insist that this is not against Christianity, but against what they call Israel's "Zionist anti-Muslim economic infiltration" in Asia, on African and Asian markets against the Arab who need support for rapidly expanding industry on the "Palestine issue."

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The Moslem "Vatican" — Al Azhar University — in Cairo is the African dynamo for a stepped-up drive to win converts to the religion rooted in visions of the seventh century Arab prophet, Mohammed.



"There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet," is the easy to remember, often repeated prayer of Moslems as they kneel to face Mecca, Moslem holy city in Arabia.

Another Maria Goretti

Vatican City — (NCY) — The Vatican City daily newspaper has labeled "another Maria Goretti" a 13-year-old girl who died defending her chastity on March 1 in northern Italy.

L'Osservatore Romano in its 1,200-word editorial intimated by its editor, Raimondo Marchini, spoke of the "sanctity" of Maria Morini, who was murdered by a would-be rapist near her farm home at Fossanova San Biagio, in the Ferrara region.

Referring to St. Maria Goretti, who was murdered in similar circumstances in 1902 and was canonized in 1930, the paper gave its salute to "Maria Morini, another Maria Goretti in immaculate flower reddened by blood in a time of atheism and boredom."

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God's World

Sincerity

By REV. LEO J. TRESE

Sincerity is a quality highly prized by television entertainers and rated as doubly precious by the advertising profession. The entertainer tries to project an image of himself as a down-to-earth, homespun sort of person without pretension or affectation. If he can make himself look and sound "sincere," the audience is solidly his.

Advertisers particularly the producers of television commercials, try equally hard to capture the elusive quality of sincerity. Whether it be a headache remedy, a hair spray or a cleanser, the aim is to make you, the potential customer, feel that this product was designed solely for your benefit and not for crass monetary gain. The advertiser's only purpose (he tries to say) is to make you a healthier, happier or better groomed individual.

The fact that sincerity — even contrived and specious sincerity — has such a value on the marketplace, should make us realize what a desirable quality of character it is. To emphasize this fact we have only to look around us at the people we know. We discover that the persons we most admire are the ones who "ring true." They are thoroughly genuine persons, unself-conscious and without guile. They say what they mean and mean what they say. Their whole deportment seems to proclaim, "This is what I am, I hope that you will like me as I am, but if you do not, I cannot pretend to be otherwise."

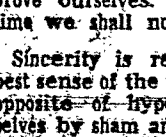
The trait of sincerity is an offshoot and a sign of humility. Humility is the virtue by which we see ourselves as we really are and accept ourselves as we are: not much in our own right but, thanks to God's grace, with limitless potentialities. For the sake of God and our neighbor we shall try to improve ourselves. In the meantime we shall not inflate our

Sincerity is realism in the best sense of the word. It is the opposite of hypocrisy. If we swerve by sham and deceit, wish to know God's opinion of hypocrisy, we have only to read the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew's gospel. There our Lord excoriates the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees in words that snap and cut like a whip.

It is not likely that you are a hypocrite in the classic meaning of the word. You are not consciously trying to appear holier than you are. However, if you are an average sort of person you very probably can catch yourself, with a little vigilance, in acts of insincerity to which, perhaps, you never had adverted.

It is perfectly natural for us to wish to be well thought of by other people. We do want to be liked and, if not admired, at least respected. This is where the danger lies. Our desire for the good opinion of others easily can get out of control. That is when we try to "make a good impression" on others.

We may try to make an impression on our boy friend or girl friend. We may try to impress the boss or a neighbor or a new acquaintance or some-



one with whom we do business. The moment we catch ourselves speaking or acting in a manner that is at variance with our true self, and for the primary purpose of winning someone's approval (or arousing his envy), in that moment we know that we are being insincere.

THE TRAGEDY is that by our efforts to create a good (but false) impression, we defeat our own purpose. It is seldom that we fool anyone by our simulation — unless it be a sweetheart. Love is notoriously blind. Usually our efforts to impress will win us nothing more than pity — if not contempt — for our pretensions.

If it is an excellent exercise in character-building to watch ourselves for evidences of insincerity. It even can be fun to try to outwit ourselves as, very humanly but very foolishly, we try to create a false image of our true self.

One note of warning should be sounded. Sincerity is not synonymous with tactlessness — with so-called "brutal frankness." Tactfulness is an act of charity by which we try to avoid hurt to another person. It is completely unselfish. Insincerity is a dishonest effort to win approval. It is completely selfish.

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Indian Baskets for Collections

Phoenix, Ariz. — (RNS) — These bright, colorful baskets, made by Indian women at nearby reservations, are used in Sunday collections by St. Mary's Catholic church in Phoenix. The sturdy baskets are made of ocotillo and other cactus plants in various intricate designs. Members of the parish's St. Vincent de Paul Society also use the baskets for monthly collections outside the church to raise funds for work among the poor. Shown with the baskets is Leonard Damiani, a church usher and physical education director for St. Mary's elementary school. The parish is run by the Franciscan fathers who also serve Indian reservations in Arizona.