

BOOK REVIEW

THE FORBIDDEN DIALOGUES

– The Impact of Islam on the Future of the African Diaspora

by Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison (1997 Black Stone Press, pp. 153. ISBN 1-871207-02-9)

The Forbidden Dialogues is an important book for any reader who wishes not only to understand and escape from the stifling confines of the black/white dialectical impasse, but also to engage in worthwhile action. Although the author, Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison, makes it clear that he is perfectly well aware of the nature of that dialectic, he nevertheless concentrates on exploring those other far more important issues which affect black people but which up to now have been cleverly excluded from significant discussion by the very parameters inherent in that dialectic – hence the title of the book – for although these dialogues may not have been specifically forbidden, up to now they have not actually been permitted.

Thus this work is an historic one, for it enters new territory and establishes new outposts. There is an emphasis, and this is both stimulating and refreshing, on assessing the overall situation of the black community as it is today – “the unavoidably westernised blacks of the so called African Diaspora” living in “an irretrievably Europeanised African world” – and how it can best be developed in the immediate future, rather than on repeatedly and resentfully harking back to a past which has already happened and can never be changed. Of course there is no denying that the “black people’s conscious rejection of oppression and subjugation needed to find a powerful collective voice and concerted action in the form of universal defiance of international colonialism, racism and exploitation,” – but, argues Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison, the crux of the matter today is how this defiance can be directed to its rightful conclusion and translated into a transformed and just *status quo* – the *next* world order.

While summarising succinctly both the past and present characteristics of “the black experience” and “the black psyche”, whether in Africa, America or Europe, the author clearly indicates the way out and the way forward by pointing out that the main issue for the black community is not so much the abolition of racism or of any of the other negative side-effects of the slavery and exploitation which has characterised the rule of the Judaeo-Christian colonial era of the last three centuries – but rather the means to liberation from the political and especially economic slavery which today binds and cripples almost everyone whatever the colour of their skin may happen to be – “the most comprehensively oppressive and technically complete system of controlled human exploitation history has ever seen. This is the reality of the modern usurious New World Order.” Thus the main issue is not race *per se*, but rather the future of the human race. The author makes it clear that the key to its liberation is the taking on of a dynamic and living Islam in all its aspects, including not only its spiritual and social dimensions but also the political and the economic:

“We must now start to devise ways of returning to the free use of mediums of exchange with inherent value such as gold and silver. This was the way of our ancestors, it is the natural way and the only sure way of gaining eventual independence from the deceptions and artificiality of the financial system.” (p.112)

Confucius is reputed to have said, “Underneath the skin everyone is the same.” In many respects this is an accurate observation. We all share the same internal organs, our blood is red, we all experience love and hate and fear and exultation. However degrees of awareness can be very different from person to person, as can attitudes and perceptions regarding the nature of existence and the way things are and what behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable

– and it is clear to most intelligent people that there is not necessarily any direct correlation between these more subtle aspects of the human psyche and skin colour. There are no such absolutes as “the black psyche” or “the white psyche”. A white man who spent all his early years in Zambia or Zimbabwe, for example, may well turn out to be far more ‘African’ than a black man who has lived most of his life in either Baltimore or Brixton!

However there is far more to this matter than the usual ‘genes versus environment’ discussion allows. The teachings of Islam confirm that there are basically two kinds of people on this earth, the *muminun* and the *kafirun* – that is, those who accept prophetic guidance and trust in God – and those who do not; and furthermore that both the *kafirun* and the *muminun* come in all shapes and colours. Because their hearts are veiled, the *kafirun* are far more prone to judge by outward appearances, such as for example skin colour and status symbol display, whereas the *muminun* are more concerned with the inward state of their hearts and the ultimate destination that awaits each one of us on the other side of death. Whereas the *kafirun* may be defiantly saying either, “Black is good,” or “Black is bad,” the *muminun* are more likely to be delightedly saying: “Our colour is from Allah – and who is better than Allah at giving colour? – and we are His worshippers.” (Qur’an 2.136-138).

Perhaps the only main criticism which may be levelled at the *The Forbidden Dialogues* is that while its author is very adept at analysing the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various black movements during the present century, and at identifying and scrutinising the commonly accepted stereotypes which often determine how black people are viewed or view themselves, he does not draw attention to the fact that his thesis will inevitably only be understood and welcomed by the *muminun*, whatever their colour – but not by the *kafirun* who, whatever their colour, will inevitably reject it. Perhaps, knowing this full well, Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison did not feel the need to state the obvious, but instead – with his emphasis on the urgent need to produce not so much a new kind of philosophy, but rather a new kind of man – has placed this small yet profound volume on the bookshelves of the world in order to assist those who want to know who they really are to lead a more complete and vibrant life.

One thing is very clear from *The Forbidden Dialogues* – and indeed this is evident at the very outset from the choice of the book’s sub-title: Having assessed the various dead-end or incomplete social philosophies by means of which various black communities have sought to define themselves or make progress – including ‘the entire twentieth century panorama of Pan-Africanism, Black Nationalism, Separatism, Radicalism, Afrocentrism, Black Muslims and Rastafarianism’ – the author is in no doubt that the way forward for the Pan-African movement lies in its leaders and its activists and its people embracing Islam with enthusiasm and total commitment – the original *deen* of Islam, that is, as established by the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and not one of the re-defined and therefore acceptable as a state religion versions of Islam. This is what Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison is indicating when he states:

“It is becoming increasingly clear that the Pan-African tradition which began with the likes of Blyden and Garvey has long reached the full extent of its potential and that the new wave of Pan-Africanists, whose features are described in this book, are the only force in any position to take up the challenge of carrying the Pan-Africanist approach into the next and final phase of its evolution.” (p.24)

“This is why the focus of an increasing number of these men is turning away from the available forms of secularist, separatist, marxist or rightist ideologies towards a proper exploration of the possibilities presented by original Islam and the inevitable discovery of its authentic capacity to address both the spiritual and the political imperatives in a relevant and coherent way.” (p.36)

“The key lies within closest reach of the Muslims and all is lost unless they can be made to reject the Trojan horse of islamic modernism which has already unleashed the fallacy of islamic fundamentalism and so called islamic banking which perpetuates their dependency on the illusory wealth of worthless paper currencies which tie every nation in the world into the banking system.” (p.47)

To conclude, *The Forbidden Dialogues* is unlikely to appeal to the *kafirun* both within and outside the black community who are bound to oppose this new approach to Pan-Africanism and to cling to their outmoded and limited ideologies and movements which eagerly reach out for but never actually reach their illusory concepts of “freedom” and “a free society”.

It is the Pan-African *muminun* who will not only unite the black Muslims wherever they may happen to be in the world, but who will also connect with their Muslim brothers throughout the world, whatever their colour may happen to be, for:

“This new breed have surpassed the familiar melancholic song of the African Diaspora whose melody floats lost between Africa, the Americas and Europe.” (p.84)

And in seeking to establish a New African Global Alliance through the men and women who have “extended their vision beyond Marcus Garvey and opened a new chapter in our history”, the author’s intention is clear:

“This book stands as a permanent invitation to all World Africans to participate in this confident historical initiative.” (p.118)

It follows that anyone who is interested in understanding and accepting this invitation should read *The Forbidden Dialogues* by Uthman Ibrahim-Morrison – *RSVP!*

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