

RELIGION

French branch of Nation of Islam emerges

The head of the French branch of American Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam said in an interview published Monday that he hated France but was sent there by God to organize blacks.

"I hate France but I must accomplish my task here. I was mandated by God to do this," Karim Muhammed told the daily newspaper Le Figaro.

Muhammed said he defined himself as French-speaking rather than French. His father is from the French West Indies and his mother is from the former French North African territory of Algeria.

"We are not a sect," said Muhammed whose followers have begun to appear in areas of Paris frequented by young blacks.

The followers, like their mentors in the United States, are impeccably dressed and sell Nation of Islam publications on street corners.

"We only want to inform and federate blacks but this annoys certain lobbies so we are accused of all sorts of ills," said Muhammed who attacked whites in general, Jews in particular and what he called "alienated blacks" who have integrated into French society at large.

The interview with Muhammed, who declined to say how many

followers his group had in France, was accompanied by worried comments by French anti-racist leaders.

Fode Sylla, Malian-born president of the powerful SOS-Racism group, said Nation of Islam influence in France would have been unthinkable several years ago.

He attributed it to the country's economic crisis and the "increasing ghettoization of French society."

There are no official figures on the number of blacks in France since census-taking according to skin color is illegal and residents of French overseas areas with black populations are free to settle in metropolitan France at will.

Some French West Indian black intellectuals in Paris have been involved in the past in separatist movements.

Many children of black immigrants from former French African colonies are born Muslim but are largely divorced from religion, growing up in high-rise, blighted suburban areas where drugs and juvenile delinquency are rife.

Such immigrants, many of whom enter the country illegally, are the target of police campaigns to identify them as such and rightist campaigns to expel them.

Gospel world mourns, remembers star

A permanent void was left in the gospel music world with the death of Bishop Jeff Banks. In Banks' fruitful life -- which included an early career with gospel giant Mahalia Jackson -- he was one of the music industry's most enduring and influential leaders.

Banks was respected and beloved for his religious and musical mentorship, for his inclusive philosophy toward all and for his powerful preaching style.

Born and reared in Pittsburgh, Pa., Banks died of cancer at age 69 on Jan. 31. A wake and funeral services were held Feb. 7 and 8 in Newark N.J., where he 31 years earlier organized the Revival Temple Church. He founded its Revival

Temple Mass Choir and led it to international fame on Savoy Records. Before that, he was half of gospel's famed Banks Brothers duet.

"Bishop Banks was one of the last gospel pioneers," said Savoy Director Milton Biggum. "He distinguished himself as a trailblazer for many who aspired to sing and play gospel music. His charm, his charisma, his personality were infectious," Biggum added. "Bishop Banks only made friends. He was well-liked by everybody."

Banks' most recent album with the Revival Temple choir, I AM What God Says I Am on Savoy Records, became a hit 50 years after his recording debut. They have released nine vibrant albums on Savoy

in the past two dozen years.

Banks' gospel calling began in his Pittsburgh childhood, when he began singing and playing piano for the Carter C.M.E. Church. He soon sang and played for Pittsburgh's Mary Johnson Singers, then became accompanist for Mahalia Jackson.

Banks' career continued to blossom and he recorded his first album on Atlantic Records in 1947. He then moved to Newark and teamed up with his brother Charles as The Banks Brothers -- a duet that became gospel icons on Regal Records, then on Savoy Records. Their biggest hit, Lord I Tried, became a gospel standard on Savoy. "They were the first successful male duo to sing gospel," Biggum noted.

In 1957, The Banks Brothers became the first gospel act to appear at the Newport Jazz Festival. The next year, they performed at Carnegie Hall with Mahalia Jackson. In 1966, Banks founded the Newark church and, soon, its choir. He often performed as a narrator on the choir's album and always was billed with it.

Their string of hits include The Storm Is Over, Prayer Will Fix It and He's All Over Me. Their albums on Savoy include I Am What God Says I Am, The Righteous, Caught Up In The Rapture, The Storm Is Over and He's All Over Me.

The Savoy family was deeply saddened by Banks' passing, but knows God's disciple has found peace in Heaven.

Chavis choice is rife with meaning

Benjamin F. Chavis' decision to join the Nation of Islam means a strict diet, frequent daily prayers and strict devotion to the tenets of Islam for him.

Supporters also hope it means good things for the civil rights movement.

"The nation has always had the purpose of strengthening blacks, and Reverend Chavis has demonstrated an ability to bring people together," said Rufus Cook, a Chicago attorney who works with the Nation of Islam. "It appears to me this should strengthen their overall effort."

Others are more skeptical.

"I just don't see Chavis as a major player on the national scene anymore," said David Bositis, policy analyst for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. "He used to have a national framework to work from but he doesn't anymore. He can't have the same impact."

The former head of the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who changed his name to Chavis Muhammad, announced his conversion over the weekend. On Monday, he said the influence the Nation of Islam holds in the black community helped spur his decision.

"I predict in the next coming months the Nation of Islam is going to grow as an effective tool to resurrect our people," Chavis Muhammad said.

"What other organization is taking men and women out of despair and making them upright? There has been a convergence and I have evolved into the Nation of Islam."

The impact of the conversion may be strongly felt within the Nation of Islam since its leader, Louis Farrakhan, is 63 and has fought off prostate cancer in recent years.

Chavis Muhammad dismissed talk of replacing Farrakhan as "wild speculation" and said he didn't ex-

pect any problems from Nation of Islam ministers who hope to succeed Farrakhan.

"It's premature to talk about successors to Minister Farrakhan because the minister is strong, healthy and vibrant," Chavis Muhammad said. "And I'm pleased to report that I have been embraced by all of the leadership. We have a good talk this morning and this was no surprise to them."

A stirring orator, Farrakhan was the chief apostle of Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad. The religion advocates separation from white society and adheres to strict moral and dietary codes.

Chavis Muhammad said he welcomes the changes his conversion entails.

"I can be completely obedient to God in the Nation of Islam. It calls for a disciplined lifestyle and that is appealing to me," Chavis Muhammad said, adding that his wife Martha will also take the name

Muhammed.

"There will be changes. For example I used to pray twice a day and now I will pray seven times a day. I like that. I want to raise my family in complete obedience to God. That's good discipline."

In the 1970s, Chavis Muhammad spent more than four years in North Carolina prisons after being convicted in the firebombing of a white-owned grocery during a battle over school desegregation in Wilmington. The conviction was later overturned.

He worked as a minister for the United Church of Christ until 1993, when he was hired to lead the NAACP. That lasted just 16 months until Chavis Muhammad was fired for using the organization's money to settle a sex discrimination claim without telling the board of directors.

Chavis Muhammad also helped organize the Million Man March in 1995 with Farrakhan.

Three Christians killed in Egypt

Attackers shot and killed three Christians in southern Egypt, the Interior Ministry said last Friday. The attack came despite stepped-up police security following a deadly attack on a Christian church.

The bodies of the three men were found Thursday night in a field in the village of El-Zuheir in Minya province, 145 miles south of Cairo, the Interior Ministry said.

Police stationed armored vehicles around churches and increased patrols in southern Egypt after gunmen burst into the Mar Girgis church on Wednesday and opened fire on a charity meeting, killing eight people, including two women. A ninth person shot in the attack died of his wounds Thursday.

In Cairo, Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, the grand sheik of Al-Azhar, condemned the El-Fiqriya attack as "villainous, cowardly and low."

He added: "No religions con-

done this monstrous act and prohibit it."

Tantawi, who heads the nation's main religious institution, made the remarks in a sermon at Friday's weekly prayer service. They were carried on Egypt's Middle East News Agency.

Minya province has long been a site of strife between the government and Muslim militants seeking to overthrow Egypt's secular government and install Islamic rule.

Coptic Christians, who make up just 10 percent of Egypt's 60 million people but are a large minority in southern Egyptian provinces like Minya, have been targeted by militants on grounds that they are heretics.

The deaths in El-Fiqriya and El-Zuheir brought to more than 1,050 the number of people killed since the strife began in 1992. Most of the victims have been police or militants killed in southern Egypt.

Vernell Laudermilk

Vernell Laudermilk was born on February 10, 1955 he passed away on February 7, 1997 in Portland, Oregon. Mr. Laudermilk worked for the City of Portland, Parks and Recreation as a landscape gardener. Mr. Laudermilk was a lifelong Portland Oregon resident. He attended Irvington Elementary School and Adams High School. Vernell Laudermilk is survived by his mother and step father; Glennie and Wilbert Butler of Portland; brothers Donald Laudermilk, Maui, Hawaii, and Aaron Laudermilk of Portland; sisters Deborah Laudermilk, Sherry Gill, Robin Laudermilk, Dedral Laudermilk, all of Portland.

In Loving Memory of Robert Donaldson, Jr.

Robert E. Donaldson, born March 26, 1933 in Portland, Oregon. He passed on February 4, 1997.

Robert attended school in Portland. He left Portland at the age of 19, traveled to Chicago and soon after met and married Juanita Martin. Later he joined the Air Force. Robert worked as a warehouseman and a social service worker. He moved back to Portland from Chicago with his family in 1964.

Bob loved jazz and good conversation. He is survived by: his mother, Novella Donaldson; one daughter, Wanda; five sons, Robert, Michael, Carl Stewart and James; 12 grandchildren; 3 great-grand children; one brother, Ben Webb; and a host of friends and other relatives.

Supreme court hears religious freedom case

What began as a landmark-preservation squabble in a small Texas town has become a constitutional test of religious freedom.

The original question that led to last Wednesday's argument in the Supreme Court was whether a Catholic church could enlarge its sanctu-

ary. But the case has become, according to the Rev. Oliver Thomas of the National Council of Churches of Christ, "the most important religious-freedom case the Supreme Court has ever had to decide."

"It affects every single religious organization and individual in the

United States, no matter their belief," said Thomas, one of many religious leaders with a vital interest in the outcome.

At issue is the constitutionality of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a 1993 federal law aimed at curbing governmental interference with Americans' spiritual lives.

A Catholic archbishop sued after Boerne, Texas, officials thwarted a church's attempt to tear down all but the facade of its 1920s building and erect a larger sanctuary.

Archbishop P.F. Flores' lawsuit invoked the 1993 law, which Congress enacted in response to a 1990 Supreme Court decision that said laws otherwise neutral toward religion are not unconstitutional simply because they may infringe on some people's religious beliefs.

The 1990 decision came in an Oregon case about American Indian rituals. The court found no constitutional right to take the hallucinogenic drug peyote as a religious practice.

Religious and civil rights groups

who pushed for congressional action contended that the court, in the rationale used to decide the peyote case, had turned its back on vigorously protecting religious rights.

The groups traced Supreme Court rulings back to 1963 that established a much tougher standard. Those rulings said government could not pass or enforce laws restricting religious liberty unless it showed a "compelling state interest" and used the "least restrictive means" for achieving the goals.

In the 1993 law, Congress restored the tougher standard. It said the federal, state and local officials had to show a "compelling reason" before they imposed a "substantial burden" on someone's religious beliefs.

Officials in the Texas city are asking the Supreme Court to rule that the law violates the 10th Amendment rights of states and local governments by forcing them to allow more protection for religious beliefs than the Constitution requires.

In Loving Memory of Mable Jean Kyles

Sunrise, June 23, 1940, Manhattan, Kansas
Sunset, February 17, 1997, Portland, Oregon

Mable Jean was born June 23, 1940 in Manhattan, Kansas to Frieda and Percy Hickman. She moved to Portland, Oregon in about 1943. She attended Boise and Holliday Grade Schools and Jefferson High School. Her father, Percy and her sister, Joyce Washington and Brother, Larry Hickman preceded her in death. She leaves to mourn, her son, Shelby Kyles, her mother, Frieda Murray and her sister, Iva Collins; and a host of nieces and nephews. Mable was a very well liked person whom everyone loved and appreciated. Her hobbies were sewing and reading. Mable worked at Bess Kaiser Hospital for 28 years as an anesthesiologist assistant. Mable was easy to love, that's why she went up above. She was gentle, she was kind, so she left the world behind. Even though she's gone today, in our hearts she always stay. We loved you Mable!

Funeral Services were Friday, February 21, 1997 at Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church. Reverend Johnny Pack, IV, Pastor of Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church officiated. Internment Rose City Cemetery.



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