

## Book Review

### *Religion and Peace in the Middle East*

*Edited by Frank Kaufmann and Justine Watson; Council for the World's Religions, 1988*

This slim volume is based on the three papers presented at the Council for the World's Religions (CWR) conference on "Interreligious Dialogue and Peace in the Middle East" held in Toledo, Spain in March 1988. The conference was intended to discuss the role of religion in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East.

The volume begins with a paper on "Religion and Politics: Dangers and Possibilities for Peace in the Middle East" by Rabbi David J. Goldberg. Goldberg argues that the on going Arab-Israeli conflict is essentially political and not religious in its origin, its cause, and in the perception of those most intimately involved. Hence, the resolution of conflict could only come from a concerted effort to find an acceptable and mutually beneficial geo-political formula which seeks to accommodate the just demands and needs of both parties. Any attempt to seek a solution only in "apocalyptic terms" would undoubtedly lead to more conflicts and wars. Goldberg claims that religious differences did not originally loom large as a source of conflict in the Middle East. This may be true before 1967. But since the Israeli occupation of El-Quds, the religious dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict has become equally, if not more, important than the political dimension. For Muslims throughout the world, the constant reminder that one of the three holiest places in their religious tradition is out of their reach cuts a deep psychological wound. Rabbi Goldberg believes that common to the three monotheistic faiths of the Middle East are "certain shared principles" that govern ethical behavior, recognize the rights of other people, and determine responsibilities of governments. The logic of acknowledging and re-affirming these shared principles may open new possibilities of conflict resolution and mutual understanding. Goldberg states: "As a Jew, therefore, I have no hesitation in asserting that the Palestinian right to self-determination is just as valid as my insistence on Jewish self-determination."

Farhang Rajae's paper on "Religion and Politics in Islam: The Iranian Context" is an important attempt to understand "the internal logic" of Islam with regard to religion and politics or the relations between the secular and the sacred. Rajae argues that the aim of politics in Islam is identified with religion. Seeing Islam as a systematic whole implies that "the distinction and separation between various aspects of life make little sense." Politics,

Rajaei argues, is simply a variable and is thus subservient to the eternal values of religion.

Rajaei rejects the current appellations of "fundamentalists" and "modernists" as opposing categories of contemporary Islamic intellectual thought and prefers instead the use of the terms "integralist" for the first and "integrationist" for the second. "Integralist" is the one who advocates a rigid compliance to the religious tradition as developed in history. This approach is represented by the writings of Maulana Abu al A'la Maududi (1903-1979) and Ayatollah Imam Ruhollah Khomeini (1904-1989). The "integralists" believe that "both the ends and means of politics are provided by religion" and that the aim of politics should be to put the tradition into practice. The "integrationists" are the ones who believe that religion determines the ultimate aims of life and political values to be pursued, but the means and rules to facilitate the pursuit of these ultimate values must be developed by man himself. Rajaei includes Jamal-al-Din Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938) and 'Ali Shariati (1933-1977) in this category of Muslim thinkers. Rajaei also argues, however, that in the context of the contemporary world where political, economic, intellectual and social institutions and mores of the modern West are threatening Muslim identity, both "integralists" and "integrationists" are equally concerned about the rediscovery of Islamic identity and revival of Islam as a way of life.

Raja Hajjar's paper on "Islamic-Christian Dialogue in Lebanon" is an attempt to understand the complex interfaith milieu of Lebanon and the role of Islamic-Christian contacts at the national, institutional and personal levels in creating conditions of peace and harmony in that unfortunate land. Hajjar argues that Lebanon has been a testing ground for almost all political and religious ideologies present in the Middle East. These ideological conflicts, which include Secularization vs. Islamization, Westernization vs. Arabization, centralization vs. regionalization, liberalization vs. socialization, and conservatism vs. revolution, have all contributed to the deterioration of the delicate multi-faith balance in Lebanon. Hajjar is right in pointing out that if Muslims and Christians cannot live in peace in Lebanon, then Muslim-Christian co-existence in other parts of the Middle East may also become difficult. He believes that the religious and cultural plurality of Lebanon can be preserved only through dialogue and understanding.

Together, the three papers included in this volume considerably enhance our understanding of the issues of war and peace in the Middle East and of the potential role of religion in the resolution of current conflicts.

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