

Book Reviews

Islam: The Religious and Political Life of a World Community

by Marjorie Kelley

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This volume, which is the print component of an introduction to Islamic civilization course produced by the Foreign Policy Association in cooperation with National Public Radio and the University of Texas at Austin, was made possible by funds from the Exxon Education Foundation and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Written specifically for adult readers with little or no background in Islamic studies, the book lacks the scholarly paraphernalia of footnotes and diacritical marks.

Divided into 14 chapters, the work features the writings of luminaries such as Fazlur Rahman, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Francis Peters and John O. Voll, to name but a few of the list of contributors. Opening the work is the 28-page chapter of Peter J. Awn, who gives a comprehensive and introspective account of Muslim faith and practice. He reminds his predominantly Western audience that, contrary to the writings of educators, writers and journalists in the West, Islam is historically a Western religion, deriving from the same Semitic spritual sources as Judaism and Christianity. After pointing out the historical links between Islam and the other Semitic traditions, he goes on to discuss a number of issues in the Islamic religion. Awn's discussion of the five pillars of Islam is certainly refreshing, for it shows a sense of sympathy and understanding which has not yet been evident among many of the older generations of Islamicists called *orientalists*. In his discussion of the diversity in the Muslim Ummah, Awn takes the position that the Sunni/Shite divide should not be seen in terms of an orthodoxy/heterodoxy dichotomy. He goes on to explain the historical evolution of the two communities in terms of politics in the early Islamic state, and his account follows the familiar interpretations in the Western works.

The second chapter, written by University of Chicago Professor, Dr. Fazlur Rahman, treats us to a 25-page study of the Prophet Mohammad. Drawing from his earlier work, Professor Rahman gives a very illuminating historical account of the Prophet's struggle with the Meccan Polytheists. Indeed, what makes this chapter quite interesting is the manner in which the author punc-

he does not stress the economic motive. He asserts that Western colonialism was motivated sometimes by psychological considerations and that the colonialists did not go into Muslim lands purposefully to advance Christianity.

John D. Voll's chapter on Muslim responses to colonialism is a good companion to Goldschmidt's piece. Here too, one sees that the author follows the sources very closely and therefore tells the novice adult reader a great deal about the Muslim world's resistance to colonial rule.

Coming right after Voll's article is Marjorie Kelly's description of the Muslim nation-states. The very title of this essay is problematic. Though Kelly classifies, in her paper, what she means by such terms, the idea is unacceptable in certain Muslim circles. What is interesting about this chapter, however, is the manner in which the author condensed large volumes of data to a few pages of presentable analyses of the development of nationalism *a la* Western Europe in Muslim lands. Yet, in reviewing Kelly's essay, one is struck by her sense of uncertainty regarding the fate of Islamic revivalism in these Muslim states.

John Esposito, the young and promising American scholar of Islam, offers a very interesting case by case account of a selected number of Muslim states. He tells us that Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, and Pakistan are examples of the Muslim struggle for identity. A careful examination of Esposito's essay shows that it is certainly synthetic, but its data base is too familiar to the expert to be appetizing. However, since it is meant for the not so informed adult reader, one can say that it is definitely a nutritionally filling and intellectually balanced diet for the novice. Esposito's discussion of the contemporary Muslim states highlights such problems as collective identity, political legitimacy, political and economic development.

Besides Esposito's essay, the remaining essays by Ann Elizabeth Mayer, Afaf Lufti al-Sayyid Marsot, Yvonne Haddad and Seyyed Hussein Nasr, address a different set of questions about the Muslim world. Professor Mayer looks at Islamic law and gives a fairly good explanation of its elements to her Western audience. Her account, in my view, is a regurgitation of the common Western texts, although one can see a sense of sympathy and care in the language of the author. Professor Marsot's study of family law reiterates aspects of a subject dear to many women scholars looking at Middle East societies. Again, here too, we find that the author draws heavily on the growing literature in Women studies in the Middle East and her conclusions are neither dramatic nor novel. Yvonne Haddad's essay on the Muslims in the United States is informative. Here, she too offers a rehash of her more detailed piece published in *The Link*, an Arab-American magazine. The inclusion of her paper is a testimony to the growing attention scholars and journalists are giving to the Muslim community in North America.

The concluding essay by Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr is an excellent one. It does not only put the whole book in perspective, but it raises the most

tuates his story of the Prophet Muhammad with appropriate Qur'anic verses. In addition to his account of the Prophet's life, the professor from Chicago addresses the historical perceptions of the Prophet in the earlier studies of Islam. He believes that, whereas, Western authors up until recently said negative things about the Prophet, Muslims tended to mythify him. An example of Muslim excesses is the attribution of miracles to the Prophet who brought to mankind a revelation which denies any such claims. In his discussion of the Prophet's message, Professor Rahman corrects many errors of the Westerners and suggests that some of the criticisms directed against the Prophet (such as his polygamous arrangements) were unfounded. He concludes his discussion with an examination of the Qur'anic text and the interpretation given by Muslim and non-Muslim exegetes. He feels that Western scholars have made significant breakthroughs in the study of the chronology of the Qur'an, but, they have failed to treat Islam unbiasedly. Professor Rahman emphasizes that the best way to study and understand the Qur'an is to master Arabic and the history of early and pre-Islamic Jahiliyya poetry.

After the chapter of Professor Rahman comes a series of essays written by scholars such as Roy P. Muttahedesh, Francis F. Peters, Ross E. Dunn, I. Mettin Kunt, Arthur Goldschmidt, and the volume's editor, Marjorie Kelly. Muttahedesh gives us an interesting account of the foundations of state and society in the early Islamic period. Adapted with additions from his *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (1980), his chapter describes the evolution of the Muslim ummah and the problems encountered by the Muslims in the attempts to face up to the challenges of empire and conquests. This chapter is straightforward and clearly written.

Francis E. Peters elaborates further on what Muttahedesh discusses in his chapter. He more specifically looks into the early Muslim empires of the Umayyads and the Abbasids. Much of what he says here is a reverberation of his earlier study, *Allah's Commonwealth*. This chapter is graphic, educative and interesting.

Ross E. Dunn's chapter on Islamic Universalism in the later Middle Ages is quite illuminating. The account given is not only accurate, but sheds some light on Muslim unity in this period. I. Mettin Kunt's discussion of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughels is also informative. Though one can criticize these authors who try to reduce volumes of history to a mere twenty to twenty-five pages.

From chapter seven to the end of the book we come across analyses of the Muslim experience since the rise of Western Europe as the center of global politics. Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr.'s piece on the colonial period follows very closely much of what we know about the history of the Muslim world. In analyzing motives of Western colonialists, Goldschmidt focuses more on geopolitical considerations. Unlike the Marxists and Third World nationalists,

salient points which confront Darul Islam today. After an inventory of forces acting upon the Muslim world, the professor then proceeds to the analysis of each one of them. To him, the present tendencies are linked to modernism, messianism and fundamentalism. He believes that each of these tendencies has its constituents in the Muslim world, but in the long run he feels that some form of Islamic unity which receives the support of Muslim states, sharing a common faith, a common culture and a common intellectual tradition, will prevail over a fanaticism and an idealism which seek after a single Islamic state. Yet, in saying this, one must hasten to add that Professor Nasr is reluctant to predict the course of future events because of the unstable nature of our present political system.

This volume is rich in its collection of essays. It is a good introduction to Islam for the Western novice searching for literature in the subject. Being a product of sympathetic Muslim and non-Muslim in Western minds, I would recommend it for beginning scholars.

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