

Understanding Islam and the Muslims: The Muslim Family and Islam and World Peace

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Format: Paperback, 96 pages

Publisher: Fons Vitae (January 28, 2002)

ISBN: 1887752471

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A concise and colorful survey of the landscape of Islam

This is an updated and expanded edition of probably the most popular, and certainly one of the best, concise introductions to Islam. One of the main contributors to the text is T. J. Winter (a.k.a. Abdal-Hakim Murad), who is a brilliant Oxford-educated British convert to Islam. The high-quality photographs in this thoughtful work are enriched by a very balanced, informative and insightful text. I know of no other book that so vividly demonstrates the ethnic, geographic, architectural, spiritual and artistic diversity of the Muslim World better than this wonderful little book. Likewise, the text succinctly explains Islam as the majority of Muslims understand it in a very rich and scholarly, yet easy to understand, way.

This booklet of ninety-six pages touches on a myriad of topics and is in a question and answer format. The questions are well thought out and the answers are brief, and since the text doesn't shy away from the more difficult and touchy questions that are often asked, a lot of important ground is covered relatively quickly. Some of the featured questions are: "*What do Muslims believe?*", "*What do Muslims think about Jesus?*", "*Why does Islam often seem strange?*", "*What is the Muslim conception of peace?*", "*When can a Muslim conduct an armed jihad?*"—and many others that get right to the point of addressing issues that are often the subject of popular myths and misunderstandings. If you want a quick introduction to Islam that explains the religion as Muslims understand it, then this reasonably-priced book is the one for you. In our day and age, where militant distortions of Islam are far too often in the headlines, this book is essential reading for anyone yearning to find out what most Muslims really

believe. A fair person should not judge Islam by the misguided acts of fanatics whose actions fly in the face of how the Qur'an has been collectively understood by over 1,400 years of God-fearing and qualified Muslim scholarship. When one wants to learn about a religion, any religion, one should seek to find out how it is understood by the moderate mainstream of the majority of its followers, not small angry and violent sects which really are a relatively new modern phenomenon.

In regards to the previous reviewer, from "*Jerusalem, Israel*", who calls this book a "*huge piece of propoganda [sic]*", well this is seemingly because it shows the true and positive side of a religion towards which he is obviously rather hostile. I wonder if he considers books that present a moderate and accurate view of his own religion to be "*propoganda [sic]*"? He asserts that the book is "*misleading*" and that it contains "*outright fabrications*", but doesn't provide any concrete examples. His ignorance actually leads him to come up with a couple of fabrications of his own. He claims that "*the Qu'ran [sic] orders its followers to kill the entire non-beleiving [sic] world*", although the Qur'an contains no such command. Even though the Qur'an, just like the Old Testament, does sanction warfare based on certain conditions (which the book rather unapologetically explains on pages 69-82), it nowhere advocates indiscriminate violence, taking the law into your own hands, nor the killing of non-combatants. Suffice it to say that historically, Muslim scholars have been advocates of the highest moral and ethical standards, thus they've rejected such facile and simplistic interpretations of the Qur'an, which is not meant to be read (nor misread) by unqualified literalists.

In his haste to cast aspersions on the Qur'an, the aforementioned reviewer conveniently omits the fact that the Qur'an grants a special protected status to Jews and Christians as "*People of the Book*" (which the book explains in some detail on page 83, complete with a picture of "*Egyptian Jews in Cairo*"), thus his claim that it advocates genocide against them is nothing short of slanderous. This outrageous charge is rather ironic coming from an adherent of Judaism, since the Old Testament is replete with calls to violence, including God-ordered massacres of women and children. Before he writes any more diatribes about the Qur'an's alleged advocacy for genocide and violence, I think Seth J. Frantzman needs to put that fact in his hermeneutical pipe and smoke it.

This same Islamophobic reviewer makes a similar blunder when he claims that "*the world is divided into two parts by the Quran, the Dar Al-Harb(the world of*

war) and *Dar al-Islam/Salaam*(*world of islam/peace*) [sic]", since this division is nowhere to be found in the Qur'an. While it is true that some, but certainly not all, medieval Muslim jurists perceived the world in this bipolar way, this was not the only view-much less the majority opinion-amongst a rich diversity of Islamic scholarship. Such distorted statements by Mr. Frantzman make me wonder whether he's actually even read the Qur'an, much less this book. I suspect that rather than striving to conduct his own balanced and scholarly research, he's just uncritically accepted the rubbish that hostile sources have spoon-fed him about Islam.

Although this book addresses various topics in order to expound upon and clarify Islam's view of women with questions such as: "*Does Islam consider men superior to women?*" (page 34), "*What does the Quran teach about Eve's involvement in the fall from Eden?*" (page 36), "*Does Islam have female role-models?*" (page 36), "*Are women excluded from any Muslim religious practices?*" (page 37) and "*Why do some Muslim women wear veils?*" (page 52), it seems that the hostile Israeli reviewer completely ignored what was presented seemingly because he didn't want facts to get in the way of his distorted claims. Indeed, the Qur'an gives women rights that they only obtained during the past century in the West, although many non-Muslims aren't aware of this because their information about Islam mostly comes from a biased media rather than from informed scholarly sources.

In his review, as soon as he finishes misrepresenting the text of the Qur'an, Seth J. Frantzman goes on to distort the text of this booklet by declaring that it "*pretends that women are 100% equal in all muslim countries*", although the book makes no such claim. While this book eloquently documents and explains the rights that the Qur'an gives to women, it no where asserts that these rights have been perfectly and properly implemented in the Muslim World. In fact, the book explicitly says (page 54) that "*there can be a great difference between theory and practice of Muslim teaching in some Muslim societies*". Typically, the main error underlying the misguided assertions of those who attack Islam is failing to distinguish between the actions of some Muslims on the one hand and the pristine teachings of Islam on the other. Being fallible human beings, Muslims have failed to live up to the ideals of their religion in the same way that Jews, Christians and others have often failed to live up to the ideals of theirs.

The Islamophobe's claim that Muslim men "*have no such modesty laws*" should also be understood in this light, since (believe it or not) there are modesty laws

for men in Islam, although many Muslim men are either unaware of them or apathetic about them (which unfortunately seems par for the course on many subjects these days). Mr. Frantzman, however, should be aware that there are modesty requirements for Muslim men since the book clearly states (page 24) that both "*men and women are expected to dress in a way which is modest and dignified*", which again just begs the question of whether he's actually read this book. Overall, it's fair to say that in the Muslim World today Islam is not the problem, but rather the problem is ignorance and apathy about what it really teaches (as opposed to ideological and cultural distortions of these teachings).

Overall, I feel that the review by a person who is obviously laboring under a heavy payload of misinformation and bigotry is quite telling. In spite of his wild assertion that one could be "*brainwashed*" by reading the book under review, it seems that he is the one that has been brainwashed by slanted anti-Islamic propaganda (and that's how you spell it Mr. Frantzman). However, in spite of his hostility, I do agree with his conclusion that if you want people "*to convert to Islam*" one should "*definetly [sic] pick this up*", since this book has certainly been a positive tool for sharing the teachings of Islam with a great many people and bringing a number of them into the fold of the pure and universal monotheism of Abraham.

In light of the fact that this reasonably-priced book provides a quick, balanced and vivid way to get an accurate picture of what Islam teaches and what Muslims believe, I consider it essential reading and recommend it very, very highly.

Abdurrahman R. Squires

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