with the fate of minorities in the world today. Institutional change proceeds by a continuous choice in the face of opportunities and constraints. The book’s counsel of blindly importing institutions from the West is neither practical nor sensible.

Arshad Zaman


Professor Esposito of Georgetown University has more than 35 books on Islam to his credit, including the four-volume Oxford Encyclopaedia of Modern Islamic World which he edited. But Esposito considers this book, his latest, the “culmination” of his work on Islam and Muslim politics (p. 4). Coming from someone who has carefully observed, during the last decades, the rise of Islam to centre stage of world politics—a “sea change”—this self-assessment does carry weight.

Islam is presently both a religion and an ideology. Therefore, for the author, a fair study of Islam—of its text as well as context—is both a domestic imperative and foreign policy priority. Esposito does justice to both. His book indeed merits to serve as a history textbook rooted in regional geo-politics.

Karin Armstrong in her Foreword to the work approvingly states that the West in its own interest must overcome its widespread ignorance of, and “entrenched reluctance” vis-à-vis Islam, a religion more dispersed around the globe than ever before.

The book tries to achieve this in a total of four chapters.

Chapter 1, addressing Islam in the West/Islam and the West, is to put at ease those who see Europe turning into “Eurabia,” last but not the least by a seven-page concise description of ‘aqīdah, ‘ibādah and true shari‘ah.

The author is aware that the media, focusing on what will spike sales, are nourishing an anti-Muslim “fear industry” (Nihad Awad) in the US and Europe, seeing Islam as an “enemy within” and disregarding all good news about it. While this delights the Christian Right like CUFI (Christians United for Israel) and Zionist organizations, it also fuels Muslim hate preachers like Abu Hamza al-Masri (pp. 28 f.).
Against this background and the appalling ignorance about Islam, shared both by the specialist elite and the common people of Europe and USA, Muslims wonder whether they really belong to their new homeland; whether they are accepted as American Muslims or only as Muslims in America.

Chapter 2 on “God in Politics,” sees relations between the US and the Muslim world at an all-time low, with Muslims perceiving the West as engaged in a war against Islam with America being the problem, not the solution, in a globalized *jihād*. President Bush Jr. (2000–2008), virtually mirroring Bin Laden’s vision, saw himself in a cosmic war between good and evil. This latter, in his view, much like his evangelist predecessor President Ronald Reagan (1981–1988), is equated with Islam.

Sayyid Qūṭb (d. 1386/1966), ‘Abdullāh al-‘Azzām (d. 1410/1989), and Osama bin Laden with their ultraconservative, puritanical, absolutist, exclusivist and therefore polarizing backgrounds are given prominence, including their unforgivable theological innovations: To excommunicate other Muslims by declaring them *kāfir* and to turn military *jihād* into an individual, not a communal, obligation: Qūṭb did not turn against private property but materialism, racism, and sexism. Even so, Esposito sees in him for Islam what Karl H. Marx (d. 1883) was to Communism.

The author nevertheless insists that the primary cause of what is called “Muslim Terrorism” is nationalism, as in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, and Palestine. (When Kemalists or the PLO speak of “*shahīd*,” it does not imply religiosity either.)

The author deplores that Muslim religious authorities, engaging in a “war of *fatwās*,” are too divided to show a united front against the extremist militants. (But Christianity, too, lacks a central authority, p. 74). Esposito then turns around to blame neo-colonialist US policy for much of the damage, complaining that the US:

1. supports authoritarian Muslim regimes;
2. applies double standards in human rights issues;
3. revived the defunct concept of “preemptive war;”
4. flouted the Geneva Accords and international tribunals; and
5. intervened in favour of a “rogue state,” i.e. Israel (see, pp. 85 f.).

Chapter 3 focuses on contemporary Muslim reformers, including “televangelists.” Ever since Muhamad Iqbal (d. 1357/1938) called for a Muslim Martin Luther (d. 1546), the question no longer is *whether* Islam needs reforms but *which* reforms, without having to choose between “Mecca and mechanization.” Most Muslims now accept that the Qur‘ān,
being the literal word of God, does not impose its literalist interpretation (p. 95). While allowing medieval tradition to be desacralized, they do not wish it to be scuttled: In Islam, as among American neo-conservatives, orthodoxy is to be reasserted against vigilantism. Esposito personalizes this issue by opposing prominent figures like Mustafa Ceric (Sarajevo), Nurcholish Madjid, Tariq Ramadan, Abdulaziz Al-Shaykh, Muhammad Tantawi and Timothy Winter—speaking of “suicide” operations—against Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Akram Sabri—speaking of “martyr” operations. Muslim feminists like Dr. Heba Raouf and Amina Wadud are set off against a fully veiled Farhat Hashmi. And media stars like Amr Khalid and Abdullah Gymnastiar are found rubbing against the Muslim establishment.

In this process, Winter finds roots of Western terrorism in the British “saturation bombing” of Hamburg and Dresden during World War II. Sabri, in turn, is quoted saying that “Israel has nuclear bombs, we have human bombs” (p. 103).

Chapter 4, largely repetitive, traces the Way Forward—the struggle for the soul of Islam—in the face of Islamophobia, nourished by Christian and Jewish Zionists, Guantanamo Bay, and the Patriot Act but also by Muslim hate preaching. The lawlessness of the Bush administration has been described as leading to an erosion of civil liberties, which illustrates Benjamin Franklin’s (d. 1790) truism that “he who sacrifices freedom for security is neither free nor secure.” Islam and democracy being both under siege in much of the Muslim world, Muslims’ attitude towards the United States is a mixture of admiration and resentment because of American arrogance, unilateralism, double standards, and hegemony, the US pursuing a secular fundamentalism (p. 143).

The book can show, al-ḥamdū liʿllāh, that religious pluralism is increasingly accepted, supposedly even Sunni and Shi‘ī Muslims becoming “Sushi.” Ingrid Mattson (ISNA), Sarah Joseph (Emel), and Fathi Osman are shown as fighting “kafirization” (p. 179) with interfaith dialogue. Here due note is taken of the astonishing Amman Messages (2004/5) and the splendid A Common Word initiative (2007), both emanating from the Jordanian Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought under H.R.H. Prince Ghazi b. Muhammad.


Murad Wilfried Hofmann