Muslims dealt on terms of complete equality with non-Muslims, quite rightly, on the fact that their relationships were established contractually and by mutual agreement, but in putting forward his views on the essentials for such a contract with non-Muslims today in an Islamic state, his statement of conditions sounds more like a diktat than a basis for negotiations and he has not faced the implications of a refusal on the part of non-Muslims to sign on the dotted line put before them. The author has very properly referred to the judicial and social autonomy enjoyed by non-Muslims in an Islamic state and the historical precedents for this, yet the spirit underlying this relationship seems to have been missed by the author in his attempt to delineate the essentials for Muslim relationships with non-Muslims today.

Dr. Ramadan’s book illustrates that as soon as a Muslim, in touch with contemporary affairs (and their implications), seeks to understand the methodology and principles of Islamic law as applicable today, he is bound to diverge, sometimes very far indeed, from what some conservative learned men of today would regard as orthodox. Indeed, Dr. Ramadan’s book is an interesting illustration of how far from conservative thought are the Muslim Brotherhood and its equivalents in Pakistan and elsewhere. Whether such organisations concede the right to similar divergences to others is one of those unanswered questions which have made them unacceptable in modernist circles while their divergences have made them suspect with the conservative 'ulama'.

The book illustrates that being conservative is not necessarily the same thing as being orthodox.

KARACHI

KEMAL A. FARUKI


In most Muslim countries where the knowledge of a European language is widespread, it is becoming more and more common for Muslims themselves to learn about Islam from European sources. At the same time, of all the religions of the world none has been studied in the West with more bias and been more misunderstood than Islam. As a result it is difficult for a Westerner to understand why a Muslim believes in Islam, and a Muslim who reads Western sources on his own religion begins, to a certain extent, to wonder why he believes in it himself.

The present book, which has been translated from the original French work entitled Comprendre l’Islam (Paris, Gallimard, 1961), succeeds in redressing this lamentable and even dangerous situation. It succeeds in showing, as no other work we know of in any European language has done, why a Muslim believes in Islam and in expounding the principles of Islam in their most pristine purity. As the author writes in the preface, “This book is intended primarily for Western readers given the language in which it is written and the nature of its dialectic, but there are doubtless some Orientals, schooled in Western moulds—men who have perhaps lost sight of the solid grounds for faith in God and Tradition—who equally may be able to profit from it and in any case to understand that tradition is not a childish and outmoded mythology but a science that is terribly real.”

The author, Frithjof Schuon, has already written several works that treat

In *Understanding Islam* the author assumes on the part of the reader a certain elementary knowledge of Islam and its history and confines his attention to religion and metaphysical principles rather than historical questions. In four chapters entitled “Islam,” “the Qurʾān,” “the Prophet” and “the Way” he expounds in a remarkably lucid and penetrating fashion all that is basic to the Islamic Tradition.

In the first chapter on Islam itself, he points out the positive role and value of intelligence in the Islamic perspective and the essentially theomorphic nature of man which enables him to understand through the exercise of his intelligence that only God is Absolute and all else is contingent, and to exercise His will according to the real nature of things. A profound comparison is made between Islam and Christianity and their similarities and contrasts especially with regard to the function of intelligence and will is brought out. The pillars (arakan) of Islam and their spiritual significance are discussed and Islam is shown to be that which is in the nature of things, as the “normal” man is the saint and not the “common man”, who having forgotten God, lives below the human norm.

In the chapter on the Qurʾān, the reader is made aware of the reason for the central role the Holy Book plays for Muslims and the “Divine Presence” connected with chanting the Book in the sacred Arabic language. Moreover, the principle of the esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾān, so essential to Sufism, and the significance of the basic formulae and Divine Names contained in the Book are discussed in an illuminating fashion. The reason for the vivid contrast between the descriptions of Heaven and Hell and the aspects of God as Justice and Mercy is also clarified.

Usually non-Muslims cannot understand the spiritual significance of the Prophet of Islam and the reasons why a Muslim can lead a spiritual life by following his example. Therefore, the name of the Prophet hardly appears in modern times in the list of the great spiritual guides of humanity such as Christ and the Buddha. In the chapter on the Prophet, Mr. Schuon succeeds in describing the nature of the Prophet as the prototype of the “Perfect man” and in displaying the spiritual character of his nature while at the same time he was a ruler of men who had to participate in wars and deal out justice to the community he ruled. The significance of the Prophet for a Muslim is one of the least understood aspects of Islam for outsiders, and this chapter renders a particularly great service in clarifying this fundamental question.

In the final chapter of the book, which is also the longest, the author treats of the “way” or ṭarqīqa in Islam and shows how the roots of Sufism are struck deep in the Qurʾānic revelation and how Sufism, in spite of what so many Orientalists have said, is Islamic esotericism and is profoundly tied to the spirit as well as to the form of Islam. The author expounds the basic doctrines and practices of Sufism in a manner that is dazzling in its beauty and depth and has no equal in
European languages. One is made aware that the author is speaking from "within" the tradition and has "tasted" what he is discussing and that his knowledge of these matters is not simply from books. Here, the most universal aspect of Islam is elucidated and many comparisons made with other traditions.

As the author concludes: "In all these considerations it has been our aim not to give a picture of Muslim esotericism in its historical development, but to bring it to its most elemental positions by connecting it with the very roots of Islam which are of necessity its own. It was not so much a matter of recapitulating what Sufism may have said as of saying what it is and has never ceased to be through all the complexity of its developments. This way of looking at things has enabled us—perhaps to the detriment of the apparent coherence of this book—to dwell at some length on meeting points with other traditional perspectives and also on the structure of what is around us as well as within us—both divinely human and humanly divine."

The book, despite a few minor errors, is well printed and translated in an excellent manner. There are a few changes from the French text which the author has apparently made specifically for the English edition.

Altogether this work is one of the most important ever written on Islam in any European language and in our opinion is the best introduction to Islam as a religion and way of life. As such it can be of great service to Occidental readers who through it can come to understand what Islam really is. Moreover, it can render a great service to those modernized Muslims, who have lost touch with their own tradition, and who, through the reading of this precious work, can be led to rediscover the principles of Islam and understand the tenets of their faith.

TEHRAN
SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR


This another work by Dr. Montgomery Watt is lucid and highly suggestive in content. Not only that; Dr. Watt is also remarkably liberal in his approach to the issues he has raised. Indeed, it sounds like the voice of a man who is genuinely concerned about the well-being of humanity at large, who wishes to see "a single integrated community of all mankind" (p. 171). But he feels, and rightly so, that there can be no world-unity without religion (pp. 3, 175). For "a genuine unity demands a community which is charismatic, that is, which has a transcendent origin and carries transcendental values" (p. 175). Although Watt speaks as a Christian (p. vii), yet the religion he has in mind, the one which is to serve as the basis for world-unity, may not necessarily be Christianity in its present form (p. 166). It will be a religion containing a "universal" set of valuations and "taking up in itself all that is truly valuable in the existing sets of valuations" (p. 164). Such a religion, if it ever becomes a reality, will be the product of what is known as the condition of "inter-religion". To this question we shall return presently.

Watt has also analysed the various aspects of religion in general in the light of current developments in sociology and psychology. His sociological