BOOK REVIEW


The book under review was written with the intention to present the teachings of Islam "as seen by the Muslim with his believing eyes" (p. 1). The aim of the author, a catholic clergyman, is to facilitate the Christian's understanding of the religious Muslim and to acquire an insight into the awe felt by him in relation to the world of belief. The approach is that of a partner in an ideal matrimony: "We have to learn the religious language of these peoples' hearts, only then can we talk to them and understand each other!" (p. 2). Though the present work is the fruit of thirty years of labour it is nevertheless a rather characteristic outcome of the era of Pope John XXIII. During that interval of enlightenment in the history of the church there was a ray of hope for a reformed attitude toward the Muslim brother and it seemed almost as if Islam was to be integrated into the academic alliance of Christian and Jewish believers.

One cannot help admiring the author's modesty when he considers this voluminous study of his only as a preliminary step which will not lead toward the aspired goal unless, on the basis of this groundwork, the actual and decisive task is taken up, viz., to enter into direct "scientific" communion with the Muslims. With this highly appreciable intention the author has achieved a most remarkable result. His work is so comprehensive and well-founded that any student of Islam in German-speaking countries is now in a position to obtain an authentic and thorough knowledge of Muslim theology without taking the pain of learning even a single foreign language. Frequent quotations from the Qur'an serve not only as documentation but also, according to the author, to acquaint the reader with the Holy Scripture of the Muslims. This has been done with such an unparalleled success that one can only wish Stieglecker would devote himself to a complete translation of the Glorious Qur'an into his mother tongue. There is none among the more than twenty translations of the Holy Book into German which matches Stieglecker's rendering in accuracy, clarity, simplicity, and beauty of style. Moreover, his language is modern and devoid of any Lutheran antiquities (from which the generally correct translation of Max Henning-Stuttgart 1956—still suffers, making it at times unintelligible to lay readers who have little acquaintance and no training in religious literature).

In its serious efforts to modernize the presentation of its own teachings the Catholic Church has not always been successful. Therefore, it is all the more refreshing to see how immensely this presentation of Islam has profited by progressive trends among Christian theologians. The credit goes of course first and foremost to the genius of Stieglecker. His translation and explanation of, e.g., the term 'isma (pp. 185-296) and its differentiation from similar concepts in Catholic theology portrays an astounding knowledge of sources combined with a rare perception of the Muslim mind and religious attitudes. If at all we were to compare the author's singular gift of understanding Islam the way Muslims do we should perhaps refer to Annemarie Schimmel's *Pakistan—Ein
Schloss Mit Tausend Toren (Zürich 1965) or Titus Burckhardt’s book on the city of FES—although the two latter works are only partially devoted to theological aspects.

After a preliminary treatise on Islamic dogmatics and philosophical terms the author divides his work into two parts: Speculative Dogmatics and Revealed Dogmatics. Speculative Dogmatics is subdivided into (1) The Attributes of God, and (2) Deeds. The first chapter of Revealed Dogmatics is about prophecy. After discussing the concept and necessity of prophecy in the light of Muslim theology and philosophy Stieglecker devotes almost four hundred pages to the prophets mentioned in the Holy Qur’an. He very ably represents almost the entire Muslim polemics against Christology as expounded by Ibn Taymiyya, Hasan Ibn Ayüb, and Al Qarafi. To find Ibn Ḥazm’s argumentation against the church so well reproduced by a clergyman is really gratifying. The Prophet Muḥammad is viewed first in the context of his people’s history and then as a prophet. The proofs of his prophethood are divided into (1) The Miracle (of the Qur’an), (2) His Personality, (3) His Success, and (4) Prophecies about Muḥammad (in the Old and New Testament).

The description of the Prophet Muḥammad as pater familias could serve as a guide line for Muslim exegetes. In a way it could almost be considered as apologetics though of a highly refined standard.

The book suffers from defective transcription of Arabic terms. In a work of such outstanding merit, such shortcomings are felt all the more. Stieglecker ‘popularized’ foreign vocabulary by its—unfortunately inept—adaptation to German spelling. The Arabic-knowing reader is rather puzzled by words like Samiyat (for Sam‘iyát). The author became aware of the inaptitude of his transcription at a stage too late for change. Only the index conforms the rules of German orientalist spelling.

Furthermore, the book cannot be recognized as a standard work of Islamkunde as it lacks proper referencing. Thus, while discussing the concept of prophecy, Stieglecker very ably traces the line of thought from al-Farābī to Muhammad ‘Abduh and proves the basic similarity of their views on the necessity of contemplative effort or spiritual exertion as the prerequisite for receiving wahi. But he does not indicate the work of al-Farābī from which the extract has been taken.

Barring these inadequacies, the book under review could well supersede Goldziher’s Vorlesungen über den Islam and Muhammedanische Studien as well as the works of Max Horten of whom Stieglecker may be said to be a worthy successor. Although the book contains no special chapter on sects and schools in Islam, the reader gets acquainted with the different standpoints in their various contexts. This is helpful in understanding each issue more deeply with all its ramifications and significance to the Muslim community. Yūsuf al-Dijwi, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jazīrī, and Ḥusayn al-Jasr, who figure prominently among the sources on which Stieglecker draws, may not be as authoritative as a number of great scholars whose names we are surprised to miss in the index (there is no separate bibliography). Among the well-known modernists the author relies mostly on M. Farīd Wajdi. Anyhow, Stieglecker has proved that with honest thoroughness and an unhampered perspective a more scholarly work can be produced than many of his contemporaries were able to accomplish in spite of their fabulous bibliographies. Thus even the noteworthy selection of material goes to the credit of the author.

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