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Book Reviews: Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church

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Book Reviews

Waging Peace on Islam

Christine Mallouhi

London: Monarch Books, 2000

Christine Mallouhi is an Australian author who has lived throughout the Middle East with her well-known husband, Mazhar Mallouhi. Together they have borne witness to the gospel of Jesus within Muslim contexts in ways that minimize the historical and religious tensions between Muslims and Christians and maximize the commonalities of faith. Mallouhi's approach to Islam, from her Christian perspective, is modeled after that of St. Francis of Assisi, who boldly strode into the war camps of his day and bore testimony to Christ in the presence of the Sultan of Egypt. This approach is based on the Christ-like principles of peace, love and sacrifice. St. Francis was not only left in peace, but highly regarded by his Muslim hearers; it is difficult to argue with a life so lived.

With tensions and animosities rising in the world, especially between some Western and Islamic powers, Mallouhi exhorts her readers to imitate the blessed Lord's lifestyle and kingdom values while resisting the worldly reflexes of vengeance, fear and trusting in power. Perhaps her entire theme is summarized in these lines: "When Muslims are skeptical of our creed, confused by our message and wounded by our warfare, the most credible witness left is our lives... Muslims need to see Jesus, and the only way most of them will see him is in us."

The author's call to Christians is to rise above the din of conflict and bear witness to the peaceful Lord, laying aside allegiances and fears that arise from personal or national interests. In this, she challenges our attitudes and points us to the higher kingdom ground previously trod by our Lord himself. It should be evident to us by now that political and military solutions will never solve spiritual

problems, thus Mallouhi's words are worth hearing. Without naively ignoring geopolitical realities, Mallouhi gives us a solid case for reassessing what a proper Christ-like response to terrorism in our world should be, and more importantly, what a Spirit-led approach to Muslims of all kinds should be.

DAN MCVAY

Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church: Exploring the Mission of Two Communities

David W. Shenk

Scottsdale, PA: Harold Press, 2003

During the late 1970s, Badru Kateregga and David Shenk engaged in a written dialogue as lecturers at the University of Nairobi (published in 1980 as *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and Christian in Dialogue*). Over the past four decades, Shenk has continued the dialogue with Muslims in Kenya, Somalia, United Kingdom, Germany and North America.

This book may disturb those who take a defensive posture toward Muslims because it seeks to understand them, not treat them all as radicals. Shenk respects the differences while faithful to his own convictions. He recognizes the "militant approach to jihad" among some Muslims (p. 122, 224, 230), but focuses on the central issues between the ideals of Islam and Christianity as a participant observer of these two world religions. Writing as a Mennonite with a high view of scripture and an empathetic respect for Muslim people everywhere, the author gives valuable insights for anyone who has personally engaged a thoughtful dialogue with Muslims.

The first chapter sketches the historical journey of the "Muslim nation" and the "Christian church"

as dynamic equivalents of community and mission. Their journey begins in Jerusalem, the symbolic city of peace for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Shenk identifies the forces that threaten this peace as each tradition copes with a quest for an earthly kingdom.

The ultimate mission of the Muslim nation (the ummah) includes both spiritual and territorial powers (p. 23). In contrast, the Christian Anabaptist mission of the church insists that Christendom was not the kingdom of God (p. 35) because "territorial and political control were contrary to the nature of the New Testament church" (p. 24).

Chapters 2-14 are designed to give the readers a weekly study guide with Qur'anic and biblical references and discussion questions. Topics include: the emergence of Islam (chap. 2); the doctrine of man (chap. 3); Abraham (chap. 4); the identity of a prophet of God (chap. 5); divergent views of history as revelation (chaps. 6, 7); political power and holy cities (chaps. 8, 9); the community of believers (chap. 10); a theology of pilgrimage (chap. 11); the Holy Spirit (chap. 12); prayer (chap. 13); and global "missions" (chap. 14).

The book presupposes an educated audience, but it seems to me that some recognition of the power and pervasiveness of folk Islam should be a part of the discussion since the majority of the Muslims and Christians in the world participate in various forms of folk religious practices.

The author has held tightly to his Western values in both the understanding of the gospel and the rational approach to its witness. His recognition of the impact of urbanization on Islam (p. 121, 195) may need to be matched with the impact of westernization on Christianity.

Possibly the greatest strength of this volume comes in the valuable "field research." Throughout the book Muslims raise a challenge to which Shenk did not respond. It is their claim that they honor God more than Christians do. This is foundational to their denial of the cross. Christians typically respond, as Shenk has done, with another set of cultural themes that resonate with those in the West—freedom and love. The typical Christian response ignores their deep convictions about honor. The typical Muslim may not get our focus on the love of God. As Shenk

observed, "God loves us so greatly that he enters human history in a man who lives among us and suffers with us and becomes one of us" (p. 73). He also notes, Muslims will respond with: "God cannot love that much!" (p. 63). They may say: "How can you govern a nation based on the law of love as Jesus taught?" (p. 156). These challenges are never really addressed. In the index, "love" is referred to on 35 pages but "honor" is not even in the index, even though I found references to it on 40 pages.

This is an excellent resource for a college course on Islam or world religions, or a weekly study in a campus ministry. It is a must-read for any Christian who has a relationship with a Muslim.

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