

why Hampson wishes to remain a theist, in spite of her critique of Christianity and, by implication, the other major religious traditions. She expresses it like this, 'I am theistic on account of certain observations as to the presence of power and love in the world. Thus I speak of the existence of "another dimension to reality"; of there being more than meets the eye of there being that on which we can draw. I call this dimension of reality God.' (213) She begins by engaging in dialogue with Schleiermacher but wrestles with any concept of god as a being who acts in this world. As she says, 'The supremely difficult question to answer is whether what we name God has agency, or whether all agency lies with ourselves.' (231) She is open to the idea that the word 'god' may simply refer to a dimension of our own reality rather than a 'being' and that the evidence which draws us to that conclusion includes the existence of love as a reality and the felt need for a reality from which we can draw healing. Finally, in chapter seven, she spells out her understanding of spirituality in this new, experientially-based, theistic worldview.

As an evangelical I was challenged by this book and found much to make me reflect. I was taken, for example, by the unexpected criticism that Hampson makes of Liberal theologians and feminists who have chosen to remain within the church while ceasing themselves to believe in the historicity of key elements in Christian faith and denying the uniqueness of Christ. She criticises them for retaining the 'Christian myth' while no longer believing that it is true, using the words of traditional theology while meaning something quite different. Her comments about Christianity being founded upon an historic revelation and the 'particularity' or uniqueness of Jesus Christ found me standing alongside her in the analysis, while rejecting her conclusions.

If I were to engage in a critique of the book I imagine that I would begin by asking for the basis upon which she judges Christianity. In other words, she rejects it is immoral but that implies a basis from which to judge. If the basis for moral judgements is not an objective given in Scripture (as in orthodox theology) then how do we create this moral construct, which then becomes the basis for the analysis and ultimate rejection of Christianity?

The book is well worth reading, if only to be aware of how someone can create an entire theistic worldview after taking leave of Christianity.

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Islam in Conflict: Past, Present and Future

Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell

Leicester: IVP, 2003, 231pp., £9.99, pb,
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SUMMARY

This clearly-written work ambitiously aims to discuss the origins and beliefs of Islam, the history of Muslim inter-

action with non-Muslims, and, its main concern, how to find a way forward from the current rise in violent Islamism. The authors argue that while contemporary political events contribute to Islamic violence, the root causes lie in certain Qur'anic texts and particular episodes in the life of Muhammad. Muslims therefore need to develop hermeneutical solutions enabling them with integrity to lay aside the literal understanding of verses advocating violence. While this emphasis on the importance of foundational texts is helpful, more reflection on why violence flourishes at certain times, and how issues of political context interact with scriptural factors would be beneficial.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses in großer Klarheit geschriebene Werk hat den Ehrgeiz, die Ursprünge und Glaubenssätze des Islam, die Geschichte der moslemischen Interaktion mit Nicht-Moslems und, als Hauptanliegen, die Möglichkeiten eines Auswegs aus dem gegenwärtigen Anstieg des gewaltbereiten Islamismus zu diskutieren. Die Autoren argumentieren, dass, obwohl gegenwärtige politische Ereignisse zur islamischen Gewalt beitragen, die grundlegenden Ursachen in bestimmten Korantexten und besonderen Episoden im Leben Mohammeds liegen. Moslems sind daher gefordert, hermeneutische Lösungen zu entwickeln, die ihnen erlauben, mit Integrität das wörtliche Verständnis von Versen, die Gewalt verteidigen, beiseite zu legen. Obwohl diese Betonung auf grundlegende Texte hilfreich ist, wäre mehr Reflektion über die Ursachen von sporadisch aufflammender Gewalt und darüber, wie Angelegenheiten des politischen Kontextes mit Faktoren der Schrift interagieren, der Sache förderlich.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage d'une grande lisibilité a pour ambition de présenter les origines et les croyances de l'Islam, l'histoire des relations entre Musulmans et non Musulmans. Son objectif principal est de chercher comment enrayer la montée de l'Islamisme violent. Les auteurs montrent que, si les événements politiques contemporains contribuent à la violence islamiste, la cause fondamentale de cette violence se trouve dans certains textes coraniques et des épisodes particuliers de la vie de Mahomet. Il faut donc que les Musulmans élaborent des solutions herméneutiques qui leur permettent, en toute intégrité, de laisser de côté la lecture littérale de versets appelant à la violence. Cet accent sur le rôle important des textes est éclairant, mais il faudrait aussi s'interroger sur les raisons pour lesquelles la violence éclate à certaines époques, et sur les incidences réciproques du contexte politique et du facteur scripturaire.

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This work, published in the U.S. under the title *Islam in Context*, is co-written by two authors based at London School of Theology, (formerly London Bible College). The authors (hereafter R&C), who share responsibility for the entire text rather than dividing chapters between them, have three basic aims (p. 7). These are: first, to help the reader to understand Islam; secondly,

to 'present an understanding of the ongoing interaction between the Islamic World and the rest of the world'; and thirdly, 'to attempt to find a viable way forward that might help to resolve present tensions and conflict'. The focus, if not the bulk of the text, is on the third, finding a viable way forward. To provide an overall understanding of the other two topics addressed – Islam in general, and Muslim interaction with the rest of the world in particular – would be a tall order in the space available. Nonetheless, a helpful initial framework for further study can be gained, as long as the reader is alert to the book's recurrent emphasis that it is ultimately scriptural text, not political context, that explains the current situation.

The work is divided into three parts. Part I, 'Looking Back', looks at the earliest stages of the rise of Islam, including its interaction with Christianity. Part II, 'In Between: the Ebb and Flow of Empire' gives a tour through history, including Muslim empires, and missionary engagement with Islam, justly noting that Western powers are not the only ones to have engaged in forceful empire-building. Part III, 'Looking Around' assesses the current situation, devoting chapters to both the radical and moderate Muslim worldview, and a closing chapter on 'Responses to Terrorism'. There is useful background here on Islam for the reader new to the subject, presented in a clear framework. However, there are, perhaps almost inevitably, some limitations, which a summary of the key argument of the book can illustrate.

The controlling metaphor shaping *Islam in Conflict* is of Muslims now finding themselves at a crossroads. One path into the future involves opting for a peaceful interpretation of Islam. However, another possible path is that of radical, violent Islamism. Which path Muslims might take, and how they can be helped to tread the path of peaceful Islam is the central concern of the book. The authors take issue with the many commentators, including some Christian writers, who attribute the current resurgence of violent Islam to the political situation in the Middle East, including the Israel/Palestine question and American foreign policy over Iraq. While accepting that these factors fuel Muslim violence, R&C deny that they provide the cause (see, e.g., p. 163). Instead, they argue that violent aspects of Qur'anic teaching and the life of Muhammad (which they acknowledge are not the only aspects of either) are the root of the problem. Hence the key issues are more scriptural than political.

As for possible solutions, according to R&C Muslims need to develop a new hermeneutic enabling them to take less literally the violent strand of Qur'anic teaching which exists in uneasy relationship with more peaceful and positive elements also found in the Qur'an. This new hermeneutic should be based on distinguishing the meaning of a text from its significance. So (p. 207), instead of cutting off the hand of the thief, as the Qur'an (Sura 5:38-9) commands, imprisonment fulfils the underlying significance of this command, namely discouraging the thief from further stealing, and deterring others from following his example. Since for R&C

scriptural issues lie at heart of the problem, hermeneutical solutions, forged and embraced by Muslims themselves, are needed to provide the stimulus to take the path of peace.

While this argument is a useful corrective to the idea that all blame for current violence lies at the door of Western policy makers, there is also a risk of moving too far in the other direction. While the Qur'an does contain within it certain verses advocating the use of force (as Muslim scholars of the classical period recognised without embarrassment), more space could be given to the question of why Islamic violence flourishes at some times more than others. Furthermore, there could be more discussion of why, as the authors note, only a minority of Muslim scholars attempt to re-contextualise elements of Islam to develop a peaceful interpretation of their religion. The question of the integrity of such re-contextualisation also arises. Non-violent readings cannot be advocated simply because they achieve the desired result without regard for whether such readings can be defended as the most plausible, an issue which R&C presumably consider Muslims themselves should address.

As for method and approach, R&C helpfully adopt the strategy of quoting almost entirely Muslim thinkers to illustrate their points. However, the work also gives the impression, not surprisingly given its aims and scope, of straining to cover a huge amount of ground. So judgments are sometimes passed speedily without supporting argument, such as reference to 'the somewhat arid nature of orthodox practice' (p. 43). Occasionally, terms could be more adequately defined, such as the crucial *jihad*, the meaning of which is wider than 'holy war' (p. 27), though including it.

The sheer range of the book means that there are many specific points that must be passed over here. In sum, while it is true that questions of the role and interpretation of the Qur'an are too easily forgotten by political scientists and others, there remains more to be said concerning the interaction of text and context.

A final word on the cover picture. This, perhaps from publisher rather than authors, shows uniformed Muslims praying on a battlefield with a tank in the background. The implication that Islam is intrinsically military seems to be in tension with the book's central image of different possible paths for Muslims into the future.

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