

Foreword

This book is innovative and groundbreaking in more than one way, not least in its choice of topic. Even though a number of studies are available on various aspects of Christian-Muslim dialogue and mutual encounters, very little has been written on how each religion, particularly the Muslim religion, approaches the challenge of religious plurality. Much has been written on the various Christian “theologies of religions”; finally, an analysis of Islamic views of how to relate to other religions is available for us. Moreover, this is not just at a general and abstract level but analyzed in the context of a particular significant contemporary Muslim thinker.

What makes this monograph also innovative is the fact that the book puts two leading religious thinkers of contemporary times in mutual dialogue, neither one of whom has himself developed a theology of religions—even though the thinking of each naturally contains the basic ingredients of such an enterprise. In fact, what Dr. Lewis Winkler is doing means nothing less than picking up from where his two dialogue partners left off, that is, to boldly construct contemporary Christian and Muslim visions of the role of religion in human life and society as well as of the way religious plurality should be embraced and appropriated.

The two dialogue partners make an unexpected and courageous combination. Who would have thought that the renowned German Lutheran systematic theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg and the cosmopolitan Muslim ethicist and religious scholar Abdulaziz Sachedina have much to do with each other! Pannenberg is well known among theologians; Sachedina, a revisionist practicing U.S.-based clergyman and university professor, much less so. What makes Sachedina so im-

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portant to this dialogue is his creative and untiring effort to argue for an authentic democratic pluralism based on Quranic and other Islamic religious and spiritual resources. This is boldly and persuasively argued in *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*.

What makes this dialogue so fruitful and rich is that both protagonists are simultaneously revisionists and traditionalists. Pannenberg's broad theological vision honors and engages the best of classical Christian tradition. Similarly Sachedina's effort to produce a contemporary social ethic and religious vision drinks from the deepest Muslim wells of tradition. Neither thinker, however, suffices to only repeat tradition. At every juncture of argumentation they also listen carefully to contemporary voices and are acutely aware of the radically transformed intellectual, philosophical, social, political, cultural, and religious situation of our times.

Religion matters to both thinkers. In their own respective ways, they argue for the essential religious nature of the human being and thus the inalienable right for religion of all men and women in a religiously plural society. Neither one of them is a pluralist in the typical sense of the word. Pannenberg is a committed Christian. Sachedina is a committed Muslim. Yet their philosophical and religious visions reach beyond their own ghettos and attempt a vision of a free society in which men and women could freely and respectfully argue for the truthfulness of their deepest convictions in a way that does not subsume the other under one's own world of explanation. Commitment and openness, particularity and universality go hand in hand in such a bold vision. Religion and politics have everything to do with each other, but neither one can be reduced to the other.

Dr. Winkler's firm grasp of not only his own Christian tradition but of the key ideas of Muslim religion is a wonderful example of the direction of not only Christian theology of religions but also of comparative theology. Many wonder if that is *the* task for Christian theology for the third millennium. Hopefully our Muslim colleagues will similarly labor in their own tradition to pursue a similar task.

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen
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