

Foreword by David W. Shenk

"Islam is peace!" declared President George W. Bush shortly after the destruction of the World Trade Center. "In compliance with God's order . . . kill the Americans and their allies", commanded Osama bin Laden. These quotes from the opening sentences of the chapter 'Islamic Jihad and the Path of Peace' demonstrate the engaging relevance of this book *Islam, Peace, and Social Justice: A Christian Perspective*. Each page and chapter is an immersion within the Qur'an, the traditions, and the history of the historic Muslim movement that is most captivating and instructive. Dr van Gorder's Christian perspective enlivens each chapter with explorations of convergence and divergence between Christian faith and practice and that of Islam. Our modern situation is penetratingly presented.

This book is not one of those soft irenic tomes that portray the Muslim way as the highest ideal. Neither is it ruthlessly critical, accenting themes such as the "sword" verses in the Qur'an, which has been much in vogue among some Western writers especially since 2001. Van Gorder seeks to present the realities of Islam in a balanced way, while remaining faithful to what the Qur'an and traditions say. Van Gorder gives a keen insight into the wide variety of ways that Muslims interpret these scriptures and traditions. Interwoven are the descriptions of ways in which these themes actually unfold within the real world; sometimes in horrible ways, as in the genocidal wars of Sudan, and sometimes in an edifying manner as in giving to the poor as an act of true piety and worship.

Van Gorder demonstrates a genuine commitment to portraying Islam authentically. As an author, he writes from a Christian perspective. And, while it is difficult for a person outside a movement to fully appreciate the inner soul of those who live within the movement, Muslims themselves will assess to what extent van Gorder's perspective has accurately portrayed the themes of social justice and peacemaking in Islam. Only Muslims will know to what extent this book is a true reflection of the soul of the Muslim community. Nevertheless, regardless of any number of possible Muslim assessments of van Gorder's work, it can be instructive for Muslims to hear the way the issues look to a non-Muslim who is sympathetic to the Muslim aspiration to be a people of justice and peace. The gift of this book to the Muslim world is that the author's description of peace and social justice themes in Islam is written by a friend of Muslims.

This book demonstrates that it is urgent for both Muslims and Christians to address the hermeneutical challenges of violence and expressions of injustice within their respective scriptures and the history of violence and injustice within their traditions. Van Gorder has opened the door for that process to commence. In these captivating chapters he boldly explores key themes within the Muslim tradition and within the Qur'an that are powerfully relevant to the challenges of social justice and peacemaking. He also weaves into the text Christian perspectives and realities. He does not mince words in his critique of both Muslim and Christian failures to be peoples of peace and justice, and he does not whitewash ways in which exegesis of their scriptures has justified or formed injustice and violence. On the other hand he also highlights social justice and peacemaking themes within these same scriptures.

Of course, all "Christians" and all "Muslims" claim to be committed to peacemaking. For example, both American Presidents and al-Qaeda terrorists have perceived themselves as pre-eminently people of God who are committed to the eventual advance of social justice and peace. Both the Muslim movement and the Christian movement claim to be committed to submission to the rule of God. This book explores the contours of that rule when the Qur'an and the traditions are faithfully interpreted and applied by the vast majority of Muslims. Van Gorder describes how that rule is actually expressed, and the enormous diversities within the Muslim movement in the interpretation and practice of the rule of God. Christians are also caught in the same quandary of diverse and inconsistent understandings of the rule of God. What does it mean to participate faithfully in the kingdom of God in times like these? That is, obviously, a question for both Muslims and Christians.

There is a distinctive Christian contribution to the engagement with Muslims with regard to social justice and peace that merits special emphasis. That is the centrality of Jesus Christ to the Christian faith. Christians confess that Jesus is the One in whom the Word became human (John 1:14). Christians confess that Jesus is the fullness of God in bodily form (Col. 1:19) and that he is the fullness of the presence of the kingdom of God among us (Luke 4:17-21). Therefore, we confess that Jesus has the last word, not the Qur'an, or the Muslim traditions, or the Torah, or Christian tradition.

A Christ-centered hermeneutic confesses, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Heb. 1:1, 2). A Christ-centered hermeneutic provides a firm foundation to evaluate all other foundations. For example, a Christ-centered kingdom blesses the Qur'anic command to care for

the orphans, but it challenges the command to slay the oppressors. A Christ-centered kingdom affirms the Mosaic year of Jubilee, wherein all debts are forgiven, but it challenges the Torah's condoning of slavery for foreigners. A Christian perspective that is truly Christ-centered relativizes both the Muslim and Christian experience. Christ enables authentic critique and evaluation of both the Muslim and Christian journeys.

Muslims respect Jews and Christians as the "people of the book". That respect can provide an open door for engaging Muslims in the common commitment to social justice and peacemaking. From a Christian perspective, a Christ-centered contribution to that conversation invites repentance for both Muslims and Christians, for indeed we have all fallen short of the kingdom that Jesus incarnated. The high respect that Muslims have for Jesus as the prophet who is a "sign" may open the way for authentic dialogue on matters of great concern to both Muslims and Christians. We enter those conversations in repentance, humility, and prayer beseeching the One who is the Wounded Healer to touch both communities with his healing grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, transforming power, and the revelation of truth.

— David W. Shenk