

Norman Anderson

Islam in the Modern World. A Christian Perspective (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1990)

I have not sought to provide a full summary of this excellent, scholarly, well-researched and insightful book. Below I draw attention to various points that caught my eye as I read the book:

Unjustifiable for Muhammad to claim that the Quranic accounts of Jewish patriarchs and prophets were exclusively received in revelation when it is plain that he must have obtained much of this material from human sources, given clear correspondence with the Talmud (8).

The claim to exclusive revelation is also compromised by the way personal and other problems were conveniently resolved by appeal to fresh revelation (9):

- Granting Muhammad to have more than four wives.
- Allowing Muhammad not to observe the normal obligation of dividing his time equally between his wives.
- Sweeping aside Muhammad's defiance of Arab custom in marrying the divorced wife of his adopted son.
- Absolving him from his oath to have nothing more to do with his concubine Mary.
- Controlling his wives' behaviour: Commanding them to veil themselves; threatening them with a double punishment for unchastity; forbidding them to remarry after his death.

Recognising that history can provide no solution, Anderson allows the possibility that "in later life, he had become so convinced that he was the recipient of divine revelations, and so sure that he was the Prophet of God, that he genuinely mistook the pressure of circumstances and of his own inclination for the divine voice that he believed he had so often heard" (9).

Anderson astutely observes (10):

It is... one of the paradoxes of Islam that a religion whose founder expostulated against the veneration given to Christ, and who unequivocally asserted that he himself was a mere man, should have ended by advocating a slavish imitation of that founder's personal habits such as finds no parallel in Christianity or elsewhere.

Illustration:

Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 854) never ate water-melons because, although he knew Muhammad had eaten them he couldn't discover whether Muhammad ate them with or without the rind or whether he broke, bit or cut them (10).

A fundamental problem with the *hadith* is that the criticism of collectors like Al Bukhari is confined to scrutinizing the trustworthiness of the names in the *isnad*, rather than the plausibility of the actual tradition (11).

We have no way of knowing how Muhammad developed erroneous views concerning Christ. Possibilities include that he came into contact with a heretical sect called the

Collyridians who worshiped the virgin Mary or that he misinterpreted the veneration given to her by some contemporary Christian groups (11).

After the so-called "four rightly-guided caliphs" Mu'awiya and his successors ruled substantially as Arab kings, paying but scant allegiance to Islam (15).

The God of orthodox Islam maintains literally everything in being, moment by moment, by a continual miracle. Consequently, even the impression of choice present to people's minds is Allah's creation.

The modern crisis faced by Islam is due to three characteristics of Islam itself: Islam is essentially a dominant creed, a theocratic creed and a dogmatic creed.

Anderson comments:

There can be little doubt that it is the Muslim's instinctive feeling that the practice of his religion cannot properly be reconciled with living under the sovereignty of a non-Muslim government... (38).

Anderson sees four tendencies in the way the Muslim world is reacting to modern problems: towards secularism, towards reaction and xenophobia, towards Islamic modernism and towards Islamic fundamentalism.

Because Shari'a covers the whole of life, "there is little difference between law and morality in Islam" (54).

Without exaggeration it can be said with Joseph Schacht: "Islamic law is the epitome of Islamic thought, the most typical manifestation of the Islamic way of life, the core and kernel of Islam itself" (56).

Anderson observes:

...the salient impression one gets from Islamic theology as a whole is that of the sovereign Lord for whose mercy one may certainly hope, but of which one can never be assured (62).

The doctrine of *al-mukhalafa*, the utter difference between God and man, "deprives the Quranic testimony to the love and mercy of God of much of its natural import" (62-63).

Illustration:

Anderson was present in an Egyptian village named Bilbeis. An Egyptian evangelist began to speak of the love of God to a crowd of men. A village sheikh protested, "Stop! You must not draw any parallel between human love and God's love. God is utterly different." The room emptied (63).

It was al-Ghazali's teaching and influence that brought Sufism in general within the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy (80).

It is the constant challenge to return to Shari'a that constitutes the defining characteristic of Islamic fundamentalists (97). Up till the middle of the 18th century the Shari'a reigned supreme, in theory at least, with virtually no other written law, though the Shari'a courts were scarcely ever the only courts. Anderson observes that

from a very early date Muslim jurists invented ways of getting around various points of the Shari'a (98). To some extent Islam has always recognised the right of a ruler to define and confine the jurisdiction of his courts and this has allowed for reforms to be made in commercial and criminal law and in establishing a system of courts to administer new codes (105).

Anderson takes the view that only fanatical revolution would lead to the wide repudiation of many of the reforms made in family law and succession within the Muslim world.

Anderson observes:

While, however Muhammad himself, and early Muslims in general, had considerable contact with Christians - including the hermits of the desert wastes to whom the early ascetics and mystics felt particularly attracted - it was not until the time of the Umayyad dynasty, broadly speaking, that a direct intellectual confrontation between Christians and Muslims developed (138).

Anderson regards Muslims as those who cannot have been said to have rejected Christ, consciously and deliberately:

The Christian can also gently suggest that the Prophet of Islam, whatever he may have heard about the beliefs of rival Christian churches - and, indeed, doctrines and ideas later dismissed by Christians as heretical - may never have really heard the true gospel or been confronted with the authentic Christ (178).

Anderson makes the point that for Muslims "the basic and most authoritative revelation of God is in a book, not a person" (207-208).

Anderson observes that the orthodox Muslim position is that God's eternal qualities are "not He nor are they other than He". He suggests that this provides a stepping stone for Muslim understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity (212).

Anderson astutely remarks:

A Muslim turns primarily to the Qur'an for help, but will find that, although he may accept it as a revelation *from* God, it will not take him very far as a revelation *of* God (214).

Anderson cannot find any verse in the Qur'an "which declares that Allah loves the unbelieving and the unrepentant, or seeks to woo the unfaithful back to himself", and, indeed, following al-Ghazali, any such verses, if they did exist, would be virtually meaningless, since whether people live pious lives or not and how they respond to God depends solely and exclusively on God's own decree, power and will (215).