

Islam and Global Dialogue – Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace  
edited by Roger Boase.

Foreword by HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal. Ashgate 2005.

Since the terrorist attacks on America of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, Muslims, Islam, Middle East politics and current affairs, and above all Islamist terrorism, have had a higher profile in the news media of the West than ever before. Barely a day goes by in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without a related event or issue assuming a prominent, even dominant, place in the psyche of most sentient adults.

It is against this background that Islam and Global Dialogue has been published; a collection of essays by 20 scholars, thinkers, writers and faith professionals addressing the subject in all its diversity from their respective backgrounds in one of the three Abrahamic faiths.

In his foreword, Prince Hassan bin Talal, a fine intellect and a towering figure in interfaith debate and discussion, sets the tone and context of the book by trumpeting the importance of effective communication in the cause of building common ground between the faiths. He believes that there are many steps on the journey to a universal civilisation but that the identification of common ground – though not necessarily total agreement – will happen through the building by scholars of ‘bridges across the divisions between peoples’ assumptions and education’.

The chapters of Islam and Global Dialogue offer a series of bridges across the chasms that divide, and provide inspiration, as well as plentiful information, for the building of that common ground.

The book is divided into three parts, entitled Defining the Issue, Islam and the West: Clash and Dialogue, and Jewish, Christian and Muslim Responses to Religious Diversity. Part One considers the *raison d’être* of religious pluralism and also its limitations: it contains an essay by John Bowden which is a model of clarity and in itself worthy of study and debate.

Part Two considers the past and present relationship between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds and especially whether we are currently engaged in a clash of civilisations. This is expertly dealt with, *inter alia*, by Professor Fred Halliday in an extended critique of the 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilisations* by Professor Samuel Huntington. It is an essay written with the power, humour and forensic authority for which Fred Halliday is justifiably renowned.

The final section, Jewish, Christian and Muslim Responses to Religious Diversity considers the issues surrounding dialogue in the post-9/11 world. Rabbi Tony Bayfield’s powerful and moving Younghusband lecture September 11<sup>th</sup>: *The Case Against Us All*, in which the author assumes the role of the Prosecuting Angel, is one of the strongest expositions of the subject one could read, and there is also a hopeful essay by the Editor, Dr Roger Boase, on Ecumenical Islam.

Finally, there is a postscript, the 20<sup>th</sup> essay, by the renowned American writer Wendell Berry. This is a powerful condemnation of the principle, upheld by the current US Administration, of making war to make peace. Berry demolishes the Bush worldview, especially as evinced in its present policies, and highlights the massive inconsistency between its ‘militant nationalism’ and ‘espousal of the international “free market” ideology’. He encapsulates all the challenges and dilemmas that beset all thinking people on this and related subjects.

One small niggle: it is thought-provoking that only one of the contributors, unfortunately a Jew, raises the issue of the wholesale adoption of the worst of classical European anti-Semitism by the Islamic world. This huge mote in the Islamic eye is ignored by everyone else, as if virulent Jew-hatred is irrelevant in the consideration of pluralism and dialogue. Readers will draw their own conclusions from this glaring lacuna.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh