

Book Review

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Islam at the Crossroads, Laméh Fananapazir (2015)

Oxford: George Ronald, xxvi, 660, index, 254 x 156 mm
 ISBN: 978-0-85398-589-1 (hbk – now out-of-print) £24.95 / \$49.95; 978-0-85398-598-3 (pbk) £19.95 / \$39.95;
 Kindle ASIN: B01BT5RRM8 £9.99 / \$13.37
<http://www.grbooks.com>

Reviewed by Moojan Momen, Independent Scholar, Bedfordshire

Muslims who read this book will find a presentation that addresses many of their present-day concerns. The problems of the Islamic world such as extremism, authoritarian religious governments, suppression of religious freedom, forced conversions, terrorism and the subsequent reaction of Islamophobia are all addressed in this book, using the Bahá'í authoritative texts to present analyses of and solutions to these problems. The aim of the author is to show that the dilemma facing many Muslims is caused by the fact that the teachings of Islam were meant for a past age and are no longer suitable for the age in which we live and that a new Divine Revelation has come to the world, the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, which is more suited. Thus Muslims are faced with the choice of either trying to force upon the world teachings that all can see are no longer suitable or else they can try to adapt their religion to the modern world, but then they are deviating from the text of their scriptures and this will be rejected by many Muslims. The only way out of this dilemma, the author asserts, is to move forward to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

In addition, Muslims are provided with the more traditional proofs of the Bahá'í Faith based upon verses from the Qur'án. In this the author is very thorough in dealing with such subjects as the necessity for each individual to investigate the truth independently (and not rely on or follow religious leaders), the interpretation (and misinterpretation) of the Qur'án, the question of the corruption of the scriptures, the interpretation of prophecy and the question of the 'Seal of the Prophets'. There are also chapters on true religious enquiry, terms such as 'the Summoner', 'the Great Announcement', 'the Day' and 'the Hour' in the Qur'án, as well as the concept of 'Progressive Revelation' in the Bible, Qur'án and the Bahá'í teachings.

Although this book is advertised as being intended for Muslims, it could also be profitably read by Christians and Jews. In his wide sweep of the subjects that he covers, the author includes texts from the Bible in parallel with those of the Qur'án. Indeed in many places, the attention given to Biblical texts exceeds that given to the Qur'án (for example on pp. 76–7,

a point is demonstrated by making a general statement about the Qur'án followed by fourteen texts cited from the Bible). This has the effect of proving the same points to Christians and Jews that the author is making for Muslims. But it also has the effect of demonstrating the harmony and unity of these scriptures, thus helping Christians and Jews to understand the truth of Islam and the Bahá'í Faith and the general reader to appreciate the coherence and progressive nature of religion.

My main criticism of the book is that, given that it is a book that is presumably intended to be read by Muslims and others who are not Bahá'ís, it uses Bahá'í terminology and names of Bahá'í leaders with inadequate explanations of these for anyone unfamiliar with them. This goes from the start of the book, where the Preface written by Glenford Mitchell uses the term 'Manifestation of God' (p. x) with no indication of what that means in a Bahá'í context, and the Foreword by Douglas Martin, where 'Shoghi Effendi' and 'the Guardian' are used in the same sentence with no explanation of who this is and no indication that these two designate the same person (pp. xix–xx). It is not, however, just these other writers who fail to help the uninformed reader. The author also uses 'Shoghi Effendi' and 'the Guardian' on the same page (p. 26), with no explanation of who this is nor any indication that both designations refer to the same person. More attention to such matters would have made this book much easier for readers who are not familiar with the Bahá'í Faith.

I am also somewhat puzzled by the transliteration of Arabic and Persian words and phrases in the book, which appears idiosyncratic and inconsistent. See for example the way that the Arabic definite article and the initial *ḍamma* (u or o) is rendered in '*Al-Ummat-ul Islámiyyah*' (p. 55) and '*alNnabiyya al-ommiyya*' (p. 49, which should in any case be *al-nabi al-ummi* or *an-nabi al-ummi*). Other examples of problems with transliteration include: '*Ahli alkitáb*' (p. 117) and Nasir'i-Din Shah (p. 132), while the transliteration of '*Rabb alAAalameen*' (p. 15) is completely inexplicable. There is also inconsistency in whether accents and diacriticals are employed or not; see for example p. 76, where the top line has accents but the next three lines do not.

These are, however, relatively minor points which the majority of readers will neither notice nor care about. They scarcely detract from a valuable book that presents well-structured arguments and proofs that will be helpful for Bahá'ís whether they are speaking to Muslims, Christians or Jews and will also be food for thought for any open-minded Muslims who may read the book.