Islam at the Crossroads
Understanding its Beliefs, History and Conflicts
by Paul Marshall, Roberta Green, and Lela Gilbert

Reviewed by Jonathan Schanzer
Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Assuming that most Americans know little about Islam, Marshall, Green, and Gilbert collaborated to produce a succinct book explaining the difference between the religion and its radical, minority offshoots. The reader is invited to look critically at the history of Islam, its basic tenets, its relationship with the West, and its modern radical roots ... all in a couple of hours.

Indeed, the book's brevity is both its best attribute and its greatest limitation. In less than thirty pages, Islam at the Crossroads ambitiously attempts to tackle the history of Islam from the rise of the Prophet Muhammad to the fall of the Ottomans after World War I. While helpful to get a sense of the whole, the simplification tends to gloss over some of the debates raging between experts in the field, particularly when dealing with the contentious history of early Islam.

At a time of reflective ecumenicism, the authors courageously note, quoting the German scholar Tilman Nagel, that concentrating on similarities between world religions to reduce tensions amounts to "ignorance." For those who would reduce the differences between Christianity and Islam, our authors offer a table to show how major and irreconcilable these differences are.

The authors provide useful capsule accounts of Wahhabism, the Muslim Brethren, and the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, Ali Shari’ati, and Ayatollah Khomeini. The goal of these movements and thinkers then is the same as the goal of Islamists today: to strengthen the power of Islam and weaken that of others. The conflict between the West and Islamism, we are reminded, is not about poverty, globalization, or ignorance. It is about power.

Islam is indeed at a crossroads, choosing between moderate and radical interpretations. And while Muslims work through their current crisis, the authors correctly encourage the West to "recognize and support the voices of moderate Islam."
Subscribe to the MEF Mailing List

Submit

LATEST ARTICLES

Internationalize the Temple Mount
by Josiah Rotenberg

How Biden Will Turn the Clock Back in the Middle East
by Philip Carl Salzman

US Arms Deal to UAE? Yes, It Creates a Bond of F-35 Users
by Seth Frantzman

FBI "Actively Pursues" a Possible Hezbollah '94 Plane Bombing
by Todd Bensman

Erdoğan’s jihad on "Infidel Europe"
by Burak Bekdil

LATEST WEBINARS

Winfield Myers on Grassroots Campaigning for Higher Education Reform

Ilan Berman on China’s Disruption of the Middle East

Samir Kalra on Islamists and Hinduphobia in America

Amb. Husain Haqqani on South Asian Muslims and the American Experience

Sign Up for Forthcoming Webinars

LATEST PRESS RELEASES

MEF Plays Key Role in Designation of Al Jazeera Subsidiary as Qatari Agent

Congressman DesJarlais Requests Department of Education Investigation of Middle East Studies at Yale

Rep. Doug Lamborn Asks Department of Education to Investigate Middle East Studies at UC Berkeley