



Islam: Its History, Teaching, and Practices

By Solomon A. Nigosian

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This compact introduction to Islam describes the essential aspects of Islam as a living religion and social force. The book is organized around seven topics: the life of Muhammad; Islamic political development and territorial expansion; the important groupings of Islamic believers (Sunni, Shi'ite, and Sufi); the Qur'an (the Holy Book of Islam); Sunnah, Hadith (the record of the Prophet's actions and sayings), and Shari'ah (the compilation of Islamic law); the five Articles of Faith and the so-called Five Pillars of Islam that govern faith and action; and other binding religious observances and festivals. The presentation of these seven aspects of Islam strikes a balance between fact, tradition, current interpretation, and commentary.

S. A. Nigosian underscores two fundamental points: that to understand Islam properly, it is necessary to see it as a major faith tradition, with Muhammad as the last of a series of messengers sent by God; and that to grasp the spirit of Islam, one must recognize its emphasis on an uncompromising monotheism, with strict adherence to certain social, political, and religious practices, as taught by the Prophet and elaborated by tradition.

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Editorial Review

Review

Nigosian (Univ. of Toronto) has written a remarkable book. Though one might quibble over the omission of any meaningful discussion of fiqh (at least it's in the glossary) or object to glib treatment of some rather controversial topics (the influence of the Night Journey and Ascension literature on Dante is not as cut and dried as the author repeatedly asserts), this panoramic overview of Islam is refreshing in its conciseness and logical order of presentation. Succinct discussions of complicated topics, such as the origins and development of Shi'ism, the causes of Ottoman decline, the phenomenon of jihad, moral and social behavior of Muslims, women's religious duties, Islamic feminism, and observances and festivals, all merit especial praise. In addition, there is a seminal theological comparison of Islam to Christianity (normally not included in a work such as this), a discussion that does not gloss over important differences or sugarcoat the rough edges that religious traditions often exhibit. There are a few misstatements of fact (the third surah of the Qur'an is not entitled Ali Imran). The occasional typographical errors, appearing mostly in relation to the author's own system of transliteration, are relatively minor. Summing Up: Highly recommended. General readers and lower-level undergraduates. S. P. Blackburn, Hartford Seminary, Choice, November 2004

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About the Author

S. A. Nigosian is Research Associate at the University of Toronto, Victoria College, and author of Judaism: The Way of Holiness; The Zoroastrian Faith: Tradition and Modern Research; Occultism in the Old Testament; and World Religions: A Historical Approach.

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