



The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology

Abdal Hakim Murad (Editor)

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This series of critical reflections on the evolution and major themes of pre-modern Muslim theology begins with the revelation of the Koran, and extends to the beginnings of modernity in the eighteenth century. The significance of Islamic theology reflects the immense importance of Islam in the history of monotheism, to which it has brought a unique approach and style, and a range of solutions which are of abiding interest. Devoting especial attention to questions of rationality, scriptural fidelity, and the construction of 'orthodoxy', this volume introduces key Muslim theories of revelation, creation, ethics, scriptural interpretation, law, mysticism, and eschatology. Throughout the treatment is firmly set in the historical, social and political context in which Islam's distinctive understanding of God evolved. Despite its importance, Islamic theology has been neglected in recent scholarship, and this book provides a unique, scholarly but accessible introduction.

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Akeem Smith says

I've had this book for a year. It didn't catch my attention initially but for some reason as i began to familiarize myself with the author (unknowingly) and coincidentally picked the book back up to read it became much more interesting. It is very unveiling in the historicity of Islamic theology and the blending of sectarianism and how they developed alongside one another. And the authors put no favoritism towards one group over another which could be disheartening to a Muslim who comes in with the understanding the Islam is how it has always been. Although, i would argue that the book doesn't quite dispel the notion either and adds that the matter is a little more complicated. Im enjoying the read.

Sagheer Afzal says

A dry read, turgid in certain places but if you persist you will gain a few nuggets of insight. Having now read this book and the Cambridge Companion to Islamic Philosophy and the three volumes of Marshall Hodgson's Venture Islam, I have a reasonable idea of how Islam evolved into what it is today.

My theory is that Islam in its infancy suffered a terrible tragedy. You see, to make sense of the Quran you need to have the guidance of someone who has been endowed with a spiritual insight. A person who has the wisdom and perspicacity to combine the spirituality and practicality inherent within the Quran. In my opinion that person was Hazrat Ali ibn Talib, and I am confident that anyone who has read Nahjul-Balagh will agree with this assertion.

Unfortunately because the Muslim Ummah lacked this guidance, schools of thought arose and to my mind deviated the true nature of Islam. Schools such as the Ashariites and Mutaziliites engaged in vacuous polemical debates about ambivalent meaningless matters, and as a result reaching ludicrous conclusions. For example the Ashari were of the opinion that God had hands and face, due to their literal reading of verses in the Quran. Then you had the strife between the Philosophers and the Kalimiites which did nothing but enervate the message of the Quran for the masses.

The fascination with metaphysics, in my opinion, regressed Islam. The subsequent schools of thought that crystallised to form the bedrock of Sunni ideology became for many Muslims a source of authority second only to the Quran. Colonialism ensured this predicament did not change.

Islam for the first two hundred years was an exoteric religion. The Quran despite its ambivalent verses remains a guide that is both practical and spiritual. That's all you need. Admittedly, Sufism was the main form of Islam for a thousand years, and the main reason for this was I think that Sufi Masters in their various Tariqa orders preached a view of Islam that was easier to comprehend than the Jurist.

In religion, a little bit of knowledge can be deadly because it engenders sectarianism. And sectarianism thrives on dissent. The matters which split the Muslim Ummah of the past hundred years are so petty it almost beggars belief. But that is why we are where we are.

Joseph Lumbard says

Overall, this is a good volume. But as with many collections the essays are uneven.
