

## Encountering the World of Islam

Keith E. Swartley, ed. 10 West Dry Creek Circle, Littleton, CO 80120. Authentic Media, Waynesboro, GA, 2005, 573 pages.

--Reviewed by Warren Larson, Director of the Zwemer Center and Associate Professor of Muslim Studies, Columbia International University, South Carolina.

This comprehensive book composed of contributions by eighty authors, including a few Muslims, covers four major areas: "Development of Islam," "Expressions of Islam," "Christianity and Islam," and "Our Response." Produced by the Caleb Project, *Encountering the World of Islam* is the primary text in a twelve-week course for Christian workers, but carefully edited with the assumption Muslims will also read it. It was patterned after the U.S. Center for World Mission's *Perspective Study Program* and includes integrative assignments to enhance adult learning: lesson objectives, recommended library readings, on-line readings, mosque trips, quizzes, and other practical activities.

The text takes a positive approach to Islam without glossing over differences. Muslims are not stereotyped and Allah is not the moon god--or a demon--as some Christians say. The Prophet is not denigrated but his weaknesses are not denied either. Significant discoveries by Muslims in math, science and astronomy are noted, and on more than one occasion, writers caution against uncritical support for Israel, or of trying to find a biblical basis for U. S. foreign policy. It encourages evangelicals to work at building bridges rather than bashing Islam, and acknowledges that "mutual misunderstandings" have increased Muslim-Christian tension for fourteen hundred years.

Nevertheless, the book might have been titled, "Encountering Muslims," as the purpose is not just to study Islam but to interact with Muslims in meaningful ways. This text has the strengths and weaknesses of most multiple-author books. It capitalizes on the strengths of each author with the diversity that affords, but risks unevenness in quality and scholarship. In attempting to cover everything, some areas are short-changed. Scant attention, for example, is given to Muhammad or how the Qur'an was compiled. And, because comments under "Highlight Icons" often have absolutely nothing to do with the topic at hand, they come across as distractions. Finally, since the text pulls out chapters from multiple sources--as far back as the 1980s--there is some overlap. Footnotes would update material and clarify when an author is deceased.

In spite of a few shortcomings, *Encountering the World of Islam* will serve as a standard text in the classroom for a long time. This excellent book makes a significant contribution to reaching Muslims.