



Book Reviews



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Islam and the Bahá'í Faith
by Moojan Momen

Life, On the Fence
by Marvin Holliday

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This month's review once again features two new publications that by their very nature illustrate the diversity of Bahá'í literature, its potential readership, and the uses to which it can be put.

Islam and the Bahá'í Faith is the latest contribution to his expanding range by Dr Moojan Momen, and one that reflects his interest and learning. Its ostensible target readership is Muslims who wish to learn about the Faith and the claims of its Founder, but Bahá'ís can fruitfully study and learn from it.

The book draws respectfully on the Qur'an and the teachings of Islam to show how they are compatible with those of Bahá'u'lláh, Whose own words are used to show the link between the two revelations. It makes the case in terms a Muslim could understand that while the role of Muhammad is not in way demeaned, His faith, like those of other Manifestations, finds its fulfilment and highest expression in the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

There are interesting discussions of such subjects as community, law, and spirituality, and an excellent and very helpful review of the vexed question of Muhammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" and what the term really means.

This book will help Bahá'ís fulfil an oft-neglected requirement for teachers: *They must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islam - the source and background of their Faith - and approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur'an which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Babi and Baha'i Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God.* (Shoghi Effendi: *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p.49)

The hostility and prejudice which ordinary Muslims can show towards Bahá'ís and their Faith is usually based on ignorance, on misinformation about its Central Figures, history, and teachings which is often gross and even, to Western eyes, comically unbelievable. This is worsened by a belief that Bahá'ís, claiming a revelation after Muhammad, are seen as apostates and heretics.

Bahá'ís who have contact with Muslims and may discuss religious matters must be aware of this background, and exercise wisdom. They must be especially careful to avoid saying anything that implies disrespect for Muhammad or Islam. Things in this country are changing slowly, and this book is useful in

that the respect it shows give substance to our claims that we do accept Muhammad as a Messenger of God, but its very use is something to be considered with care.

Whatever use is made of it, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith makes a significant contribution to religious studies and dialogue.

Life, On the Fence also makes a Bahá'í contribution to a specific area, less exalted but of great cultural importance in the West. It is the autobiography of Marvin "Doc" Holliday, noted American jazz musician, a performer, musicologist, and committed Bahá'í.

It has to be said that those who do not particularly like jazz are unlikely to gain much from this book. On the other hand those who do will probably find it fascinating and rewarding. It gives an account of Holliday's life and career, touches on various issues such as racial prejudice within the jazz world, and tells enough about his religious beliefs and their influence on him to cause the seeker to want to know more.

We should always be watching for new ways to help the Bahá'í Faith reach the wider community. Only a few people give a warm initial response to a direct presentation of the history and teachings, but many more will take an interest if they can see how it relates to their lives and what they make of it. *Life, On the Fence* is the sort of book that can do this in a specialised area where we have hitherto had few printed resources. It can, and should, be made available to musicians and devotees of jazz, whether this means given to individual friends and contacts, or presented to clubs and to college departments of music. Quite apart from the pleasure it will give to interested readers, it is book that cries out to be used in this way.

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