

Preface

With this issue of *Religious Studies and Theology*, our articles address two ongoing areas of concern to the international community: the shifts taking place in understanding Islamic tradition, and the continuing legacy of mis-ionizing among original peoples. Both of these areas are multidimensional, and this diversity is represented by our authors.

Thus, in David Gay's study, we confront the fact that understanding Islam has been so consistently presented through Arab filters that many of us, including many scholars, have registered Islam only as an Arab phenomenon. Of course we intellectually know that is not the case, but the conflict over Israel, and the rise of the Saudi Osama bin Ladin have so dominated world paradigms that even scholars tend to register Islam as purely Arab. We tend to forget that Islam has been so consistently connected to fanaticism and fundamentalism that it shapes the very way in which a Muslim immigrant in the West lives. In Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* Gay explores a writer who is both an immigrant to America from Pakistan, and an individual trying to make sense of the cultural influences with which he has to contend. Here, Hamid has to deal with the word fundamentalist and what that does to him. Does his life in New York represent the best way of moving beyond the cultural matrix that is both Islamic and "fundamentalist?" Gay indicates that much of the strategy for shifting involves the content of the word, along with its multiple meanings and emotional overtones. In his book Hamid explores both how the word captures the Muslim immigrant, and also structures his life in ways that are quite beyond anything that he really wishes.

Ahmad Yousif is very much aware of how much fundamentalism and fanaticism are connected in the popular Western mind, and in his article, "Fundamentalism and Fanaticism: A Comparative Analysis," he tries to unpack some of the more cogent dimensions. Furthermore, he wants to elucidate how Muslims groups see the connections, in an effort to bring some international recognition on when and how the words should be linked. He reviews some of the principal sources of Islamic law are, and demonstrates the confines through which the words operate within an Islamic worldview. The result is an opening to discourse, and a much more complex model of when and how these words can be applied.

Another misconception is that missionaries were always and forever bearers of a colonialist mentality, and wherever the gospel was preached it was the missionaries who carried the ball for Western dominance. Walter Vanast's "Tiqtiq, Brother Tadger and Charles Dickens: The Theatre in the Round of Mackenzie Inuit Missions, 1857–1863" demonstrates conclusively that this was not the case. Indeed the colonialist project was a much more complex phenomenon, and that missionaries may well have ameliorated the situation somewhat. His article demonstrates that we should be cautious too about applying one yardstick to all missionary activity, for it is clear from his material that groups decided on conversion for many reasons, not all of them having anything to do with religion.

Our issue ends with two other pieces of significance: the reflection by Mohammad Emami on a little-known connection between two giants scholars in religion in the twentieth century, Massignon and Shariati. His "Louis Massignon and Ali Shariati: An Enigmatic Encounter of Christianity and Islam" demonstrates a linkage that to my knowledge has not been noticed before. Finally, we unfortunately have to say goodbye to another great scholar, Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi. His passing makes us all poorer.

On a warmer note, it is also an occasion for me to thank so many of you, our readers, for consistently supporting and assisting in the production of the Journal *Religious Studies and Theology*. My appreciation to Janet Joyce of Equinox, and our Canadian colleague Russell Adams, who has done such a splendid job in making the Journal readable and enjoyable. In addition, I would like to express my appreciation to all those who have read and critiqued articles over my long association with the Journal.

My connection to it reaches back to the 1980's, when for almost a decade I served as editor, until it was passed to the University of Saskatchewan. It returned to the University of Alberta in the late 1990s, and I have served as editor from 1997 to today. While there are still articles "in the pipe" from my tenure, I am very pleased that my colleague Dr. Willi Braun from Religious Studies at the University of Alberta will henceforth take on the role of editor. So as the baton is passed, I hope you will continue to read and enjoy what has become a critical Journal in interdisciplinary studies in religion, and a key venue for a distinctive Canadian voice in the academic cultural milieu.

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