

The Teaching and Study of Islam in Western Universities

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Reviewed by Nevad KAHTERAN*

The Teaching and Study of Islam in Western Universities, Routledge publication, should be applauded in this cacophony in the post-9/11 world with the rise of interest in Islam and Islamic matters across the globe, necessitating an explanation of the authentic teaching of this religion anew in light of the challenges of the present-day situation not only in New Zealand, Australia and Pacific region, including the Canadian context there as well, but world-wide. Among many other efforts taken in the meantime, something similar was done in the European context as early as the Brill's edition of *Muslims in the Enlarged Europe: Religion and Society*, edited by Brigitte Maréchal, Stefano Allievi, Felice Dassetto and Jørgen Nielsen (Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2003) with its special stress on After September 11: Islam in General and European Muslims. Also, we may add an interesting report *Islam on Campus: teaching Islamic Studies at Higher Education Institutions in the UK* (Report of a conference held at the University of Edinburgh, 4 December 2006 in: *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, Volume 28, Issue 3, 2007, pages 309–29), *The Islam in the West Program* (currently housed at the Prince Alwaleed Islamic Studies Program), among many other undertakings in this regard as good examples of similar efforts.

As it is clearly expressed in the introductory chapter of this book, essays were gathered from a colloquium held in New Zealand on “The Role of Study of Islam in the Western University”. It was a part of the wider activity of establishing the New Zealand Centre for the Study of Islam and Muslim cultures (CSIMCNZ) co-hosted by the University of Otago and Victoria University of Wellington, taking into account the fact that this country is becoming much more religiously and culturally diverse with its Muslim migrant communities from South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and refugee communities from Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Accordingly, this book relies upon the two central questions

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that arise through the teaching of Islam: a) what relation exists between the study of the religion of Islam and the study of those cultures that have been shaped by that religion?, and b) what is the appropriate public role of a scholar of Islam? Discussions about the academic teaching of Islam, appropriate shapes of such programs, and assumptions that ought to underlie such study organized by this centre are focused on these four areas:

1. It will offer high-quality undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Islamic studies;
2. The centre will foster postgraduate and staff research in topics relating to the study of Islam and of the Muslim world;
3. The centre will take a role in public debates on Islam and issues concerning Muslims in New Zealand, and
4. The centre will develop links and relationships with other such centres in Australia, and across the globe with exchange of scholars and other resources.

The Teaching and Study of Islam in Western Universities is divided into three parts and consists of twelve chapters. The introductory chapter sets the scene and lays a great stress on the fact that the topic of how Islam is to be studied and taught is now generally a concern in the West, especially in Europe. This was an additional reason to draw a parallel with the afore mentioned Brill's edition as well, and there is no doubts that this present volume will be of great interest to a wide variety of readers dealing with Islam, and particularly general Islamic studies. The editors with their own contributions joined their hands with Gregory W. Dawes, Anthony H. (Tony) John, Eric Kolig, Christopher van der Kroght, Andrew Rippin and Katherina Völker from one side, and Mohammad Hashim Kamali and Zarina Nalla, both from Malaysia, and Abdullah Saeed from the University of Melbourne, from the other side. And as a result, in the first three chapters (part 1), we have a wide-ranging analysis of this topic, setting out some of the major conceptual issues (Islam in particular within the contemporary research university). Part 2 discusses different perspectives on the academic study of Islam as a course option in the Western university, while part 3 addresses some specific issues and challenges in the teaching of Islam in the modern university centres.

This book represents a collaborative effort toward achieving the goal of knowing Islam. Needless to say, based on the extensive bibliographic research, field studies and contributions of mentioned editors and included scholars in this

project, this book provides a rare and useful overall-updated review of the state of the Islamic matters in Western academia and international higher-education landscape.