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“O People of the Book”: An Exegetical Analysis
of the Ahl al-Kitāb in Qur’ānic Discourse

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Conference Report

International Conference on Religion, Culture and Governance in the
Contemporary World (ICRCG2018) 3-4 October 2018
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Muhamad Razak (Chapter 14) claims that the Arab Uprising phenomenon was driven and mobilized by Nahdah Islam, or the sense of Islamic revivalism among the Arab populations. By adopting Hegel's philosophy of history, he claims that the Arab Uprisings is a thesis of new hope for changes in modern Arab-Muslim civilization and therefore a birth from its previous synthesis stage. It will then be followed by an anti-thesis movement, which suggests that more and more political uncertainties will occur before reaching a new cycle of synthesis – which he proposes as the Arab Uprisings 2.0. Muhamad's study seems to have an element of bias towards Islamists and Islamism, as most of the arguments are drawn from his personal view as a member and former president of the Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM). Whilst not providing a critical analysis, the author also fails to consider the role of secularists, Arab nationalists and leftists in contributing to the success of Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, as well the January 25th Egyptian Uprising. I argue that the main challenge of the previous Tunisian and Egyptian regime – from Ben Ali to Mubarak - came not only from Islamist opposition but also from secular intellectuals.

Overall, this edited book has presented a number of thoughts on the Arab Spring phenomenon from different contexts – most interestingly regarding its possible influence and impact on the Malaysian society and politics. Despite several shortcomings, I believe that this volume could provide some valuable references to interested Malay readers, students and researchers on the issues of post-Arab Spring. This book is certainly a compilation of works that I highly recommend.

Faith in an Age of Terror. Edited by Quek Tze Ming and Philip E. Satterthwaite. Singapore: Genesis Books, 2018, pp.150. ISBN: 978-981-48-0707-4

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This book is timely considering that the beginning of the 21st century is marked by the tragedy of 9/11 which witnessed the most heinous act of terrorism committed in the land of democracy. This tragedy has changed

the discourse on religion and terrorism and continues to be discussed by scholars. Experts are interested to explore the role of religion especially Christianity and Islam in the age where religious fundamentalism has been closely linked to violent acts. The book contains nine chapters that are based on papers presented at the conference on 'Faith in an Age of Terror' organised by the Biblical Graduate School of Theology (BGST), Singapore. The editors of this book, Quek Tze-Ming and Philip E. Satterthwaite, are lecturers at the BGST. The most interesting fact about the book is that it includes the perspective of inter-faith relations especially Muslim-Christian relations and the discussion on how to move forward in a multi-cultural and diverse society such as Singapore. The other contributors to the book are from various academic disciplines such as Sociology, Political Science, and Theology. They are Kumar Ramakrishna, Robert M. Solomon, Timothy T.N Lim, Lewis E. Winkler, Kiem-Kiok Kwa, Sng Bee Bee, Benjamin Pwee, and Mohammad Alami Musa. Through the inter-disciplinary perspective of these contributors the book discusses terror acts that are inspired by religious values, and methods that religious community can adopt in trying to understand and curb them.

The first chapter is fundamental as it sets up the foundation for further discussions on religion and society. It is the chapter that caught this reviewer's attention instantly as the author, Kumar Ramakrishna, discusses how religious fundamentalism results in extreme behaviour. Through the sociological perspective of religion, he explains in details the process which creates the in-group and out-group whereby the values shared by a group may clash with others. The fundamentalist groups that are more prone to use violence to achieve their purposes are often extreme in their religious views especially regarding the 'end of the world'. They also, more often than not, have charismatic leaders who convince them that they are on the right path of achieving the pleasure of God. He draws the example of the Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu (known as the 'Buddhist bin Laden) of Myanmar and suggested that Muslims and Christians should learn that religiously motivated violence is not a characteristic of any particular religion; rather, it transcends all religions given their common tendency to create in-group feeling based on shared values. Therefore, all religions are susceptible to be hijacked by groups that struggle to establish their own version of 'truth'. As for that, he reminds religious communities to be alert on the intensification of these tendencies within their own communities.

The majority of the other chapters mainly discuss Christian perspective in dealing with terrorism. Their titles are: 'Religious Violence: A Biblical and Theological Response', 'Christian Pastoral Responses to Islamist Terrorism', 'On Overcoming Mimetic and Contagion Violence', 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Challenges and Opportunities', 'Discerning the Truths about Theological and Religious Belief', and 'Evangelical Christianity: Abetting or Abating Terror?', and 'Moving from Missional Evangelism to Public Theology in Asia Today'. Most of the chapters mentioned above analyse the role of Christians as responsible citizens in Singapore's multi-cultural society; and the importance of engagement with other faiths especially Muslims in order to ensure that terrorism would not gain ground in Singapore. The narratives of religious dialogues should also take into consideration the existence of multi-faith society, and therefore, both Christians and Muslims should collaborate and cooperate. Instead of focusing on theological differences what should be emphasized is their shared Abrahamic covenant. The needs arise as Christians are often seen as the target of terrorist attacks in Asia. Christians in Southeast Asia are conscious of the fact that there are three predominantly Muslim countries in the region namely Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. The other countries such as Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Philippines have significant Muslim minority population. Therefore, the dialogues between Muslims and Christians need to take place in progressive direction which hopefully will lead to mutual cooperation and understanding. To move forward, both religious communities have responsibilities to reform their discourses to enable the creation of safe space for dialogues in a pluralist society.

Mohammad Alami Musa contributed a chapter on 'Muslim Perspectives on the Rise of Islamist Terrorism'. He discusses the confusion of identity due to imperative modernisation process, often as a result of colonial legacies, which, according to him, breeds terrorism in Muslim communities. The failure for these Muslims to reconcile their religious identity with the modern identity is often manifested in the resentments they have towards the State which has failed to address the socio-economic and political crisis. They see the State and its mismanagement as the product of Western invasion and interference. This led to the rise of violent sentiments and the use of religious values to legitimise the terror acts. He proposes revisiting the reform of Islamic

political thought in order to reconcile with secularism, democracy, and modern nation-states. Lewis E. Winkler also touches on the role of Muslims in the chapter titled 'Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Challenged and Opportunities'. Here, he raises the challenges in having peaceful and enlightened discussions between the two faith groups due to high level of distrust and cynicism. He suggests that there are opportunities for both communities to move beyond the existing stage by concentrating on having dialogues on themes that will enable both Christians and Muslims to discuss on the same wavelength.

The book provides a new insight on the role of religion in dealing with terrorism. It proposes that faith groups play a crucial role in addressing the issue of terrorism. The missing link in previous discourse on terrorism in Asia is addressed in the book which is the relations between different faith groups in addressing religious extremism and terrorism. Nevertheless, the book suffers from a serious drawback. It pays too much attention on Christian conversation. Perhaps this is understandable considering that the book is an outcome of a Christian-themed conference. However, it would be more interesting to see the perspective of other dominant religions in Singapore and Southeast Asia such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Nevertheless, the book is extremely useful for readers who seek to understand Christian perspective on the issue of terrorism and how they view their relationship with others especially the Muslim religious groups. Religion, undeniably, throughout the history of mankind has shown potentials to be used as a tool for extremism and violence. However, religion also promotes positive values that should not be disregarded such as peace, kindness, love, and righteousness. Therefore, it is important for religious groups especially in a multi-cultural society such as in Singapore and Malaysia to promote mutual understanding and mutual respect among them and to deny extremist and terrorist groups from using religious values as their drive.

**Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion. By Gareth Stedman Jones.
London: Penguin Books, 2017, pp. 768. Paper Back. ISBN 978-0-141-02480-6.**

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