

Muslim Understanding of Other Religions – A Study of Ibn Ḥazm’s Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Aḥwāl wa al-Nihal by Ghulam Haider Aasī. Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Islamic Research Institute, 1999, 231 pp. ISBN 1 5654 092 6 PB.

Reviewer: Murad Hofmann, a former German Ambassador currently residing in Istanbul, Turkey.

There are many Western Orientalists, however, Muslim Occidentalists are scarce. Ahmed Deedat notwithstanding, this is even more true in the more narrow field of religious research, characterized by a scarcity of Muslim specialists in Judaic and Christian studies. This current situation obscures the fact, that once upon a time Muslim scholars like al-Birūnī and Ibn Taymiyyah had excelled in this field and that Ibn Ḥazm’s work in comparative religion was not only brilliant but ground-breaking.

Thanks to A.G. Chejne’s biography, *Ibn Ḥazm* (Chicago: Kazi Publications 1982), it is now easy for English speaking Muslims to appreciate the genius and versatility of this man who, together with Ibn Bājja, Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn Rushd ranks among the greatest intellects of that cultural miracle called Muslim Andalusia. In fact, Ibn Ḥazm was absolutely extraordinary as a sophisticated humanist, a poet, a master of aesthetics and the psychology of love, a legal wizard, a philosopher and teacher of logic, and a theologian of boot. Its is remarkable in itself that the (now defunct) Zahirite madhhab, in contrast with the other Schools of Law, reached its pinnacle only in the 11th century, with Ibn Ḥazm as their towering imam. Ibn Ḥazm was not only prolific but also radical, both in thought and speech. He was not a primate literalist when rejecting any interpretation of divine norms or their extension via *qiyās*, *ijmā’*, *ra’y* or any other method of *ijtihād* – a position partially re-adopted by Muḥammad Asad in the twentieth century. But he was naïve in overlooking that any reading of a text amounts to its interpretation and that the modern world cannot be run with the Qur’anic *Sharī‘ah* alone, without added legislation based on its principles (*maqāṣid*).

Ibn Ḥazm’s monumental work on comparative religion, *Kitāb al-Faṣl* (Full title: On the Differences in Religious Traditions, Passions,

know it is a creative innovation by disciples, not only of St. Paul but also others.

Aasi rightly states, the astonishing accomplishment is that “with his critique, Ibn Ḥazm was centuries ahead of his time” (p. 132). This the author substantiates by a useful review of later Christian critique of similar nature, beginning in the Renaissance (with John S. Mill), continuing during the Reformation (with Richard Simon) and continuing during the Enlightenment (with Hermann Samuel Reimarus) and Johann Jacob Driesbach). Since Aasi mainly quotes from Reimarus’ devastating rationalistic critiques of the Evangels, it is perhaps of interest to know that they could only be published after his death. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who dared to do that, was heavily censored for it. The entire scandal finally resulted in Lessing’s famous play, *Natahn der Weise* (Nathan, the Wise, 1779), a drama exclusively portraying Muslims as personalities of perfect character. These and other penetrating critics of Christian tradition, mostly German scholars, had no idea that they had stumbled over problems which Ibn Ḥazm had raised 700 or more years ago.

The author does mention Rudolf Butmann, the great “De-Mythologizer” of the New Testament, and the current “quest for a historical Jesus”. But he does not take us all the way through to Adolf Harnack, Adolf Schlatter, Paul Tillich, John Hick, Hans Kung, Gerd Ludemann and Mathew Fox, i.e. to the contemporary implosion of Christian Christology. Such an intellectual journey would have helped the author to prove that Ibn Ḥazm’s essential views have indeed become dominant even among Christian scholars. What a triumph!

Both Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari in his Foreword and the author, draw our attention to the fact that Ibn Ḥazm (whose sharp tongue created enemies all around him) in violation of the Qur’anic command in point was probably too aggressive in his exchange with members of other faith, a bit like Ahmed Deedat. Take, for instance, this amusing argumentation of his: “how does Jesus’ referring to God as ‘My Father’ qualify him as divine while the same usage by others does not make *them* divine as well?” winning a point and winning sympathies should coincide.

Even while the manuscript has been cleaned up, quite a few irritating repetitions have remained, as between p. 48 and 54 and between p. 117 and 135. On p. 45 we meet al-Manṣūr at the end of this life and on p. 53 at the beginning. On p. 40, the 2nd sentence of

para. 2 is a *non-sequitur*. Spelling mistakes are rare, except in German vocabulary, as on p. 139 (4 times Griesbach, not Greisbach), p. 142 (Religionsgestchichtliche Schule) and p. 209 (Ibn Ḥazm's title under "Wiedermann" is unrecognizable).

Ghulam Haider Aasi, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the American Islamic College in Chicago, of Pakistani origin, has made the mistake of offering for publication what had been drafted as his Ph.D. thesis at Temple University. This, at any rate, seems to explain a lot of material in the book that is not immediately relevant for its subject, including an enormous 14 page bibliography, and the unnecessary use of foreign vocabulary, like *weltanschauung* (for which the adequate translation "world-view" exists).

I am certainly not alone in hoping that Dr. Ansari will soon continue his new series on comparative religion with Ibn Taymiyyah, yes, even before that by a complete edition in English of Ibn Ḥazm's *Kitāb al-Faṣl*.

Modern Islamic Political Thought by Ḥamīd Enāyat. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2001, 307. pp. ISBN 983-9154-15-X.

Reviewer: Dr. Wahabuddin Ra'ees, Department of Political Science, IIUM.

After the collapse of *al-khilāfah al-ʿUthmāniyyah*, some Western intellectuals believed that Islam had become socially and politically irrelevant and that Islam and modernism are antithetical. Hamid Enayat challenges this perception and shows the relevance of Islam to the contemporary world by investigating the intellectual legacy of the sunnī and shīʿī schools of thoughts in Islam. Enayat explores two essential elements in the writings of modern Muslim thinkers: (1) "the concept of the Islamic State from the time it was revived after the abolition of the" *khilāfah ʿUthmaniyyah* and (2) "the Muslim response to the challenge of alien ideologies of nationalism, democracy and socialism" (p. xvi).

Enayat, first, argues that sunnī-shīʿī dispute has come of age, moving "from confrontation to cross-sectarian fertilization" (p. xiv)