



Islam and the Destiny of Man

Charles Le Gai Eaton

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Islam and the Destiny of Man by Charles Le Gai Eaton is a wide-ranging study of the Muslim religion from a unique point of view. The author, a former member of the British Diplomatic Service, was brought up as an agnostic and embraced Islam at an early age after writing a book (commissioned by T.S. Eliot) on Eastern religions and their influence upon Western thinkers. As a Muslim he has retained his adherence to the perennial philosophy which, he maintains, underlies the teachings of all the great religions.

The aim of this book is to explore what it means to be a Muslim, a member of a community which embraces a quarter of the world's population and to describe the forces which have shaped the hearts and the minds of Islamic people. After considering the historic confrontation between Islam and Christendom and analysing the difference between the three monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the author describes the two poles of Muslim belief in terms of 'Truth' and 'Mercy'--the unitarian truth which is the basis of the Muslim's faith and the mercy inherent in this truth. In the second part of the book he explains the significance of the Qur'an and tells the dramatic story of Muhammad's life and of the early Caliphate. Lastly, the author considers the Muslim view of man's destiny, the social structure of Islam, the role of art and mysticism and the inner meaning of Islamic teaching concerning the hereafter.

Throughout this book the author is concerned not with the religion of Islam in isolation, but with the very nature of religious faith, its spiritual and intellectual foundations, and the light it casts upon the mysteries and paradoxes of the human condition.

Islam and the Destiny of Man Details

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Mohammed Yusuf says

Shagufta says

A powerful and beautiful read. My full reflection/review on the book can be found on my blog Immersing in the Sea here: <http://shaguftaseeks.wordpress.com/20...>

Zayn Gregory says

Often listed as one of the best introductory books on Islam for the seeker, I'm probably approaching Gai Eaton's Islam and the Destiny of Man 20 years too late, but I wanted to read it before I recommend it to anyone. There was plenty to enjoy. The book is split into three parts, beginning with a civilizational overview of Islam and the Christian West, coming into its own in the middle third with the life and times of Prophet Muhammad, and hitting an emotional high point with the Caliphate of Sayyidina Umar. One story is too great not to share. He relates an argument between Umar and his General Amr ibn al-As. Umar had confiscated for the Baitul Mal half the wealth Amr had gained from conquering Egypt. Amr

complained of the 'evil age' in which an honorable man could be so ill treated. Umar replied, "Were it not for this age which you hate you would now be kneeling in the courtyard of your house at the feet of a goat whose abundance of milk would please you or its scarcity dismay you."

May Allah bless Sayyidina Umar!

The sequence of topics and their treatment is charmingly idiosyncratic, with surprising points of reference, and unique metaphors and similes piled high: the Shariah functioning as a great shoal of fish for us minnows; the Sunnah as a trellis and Man as a climbing shrub. It builds to great effect, and at the end I marvelled at this

wonderful man who found his home in Islam.

Islam and the Destiny of Man is a classic, and was a rare and important book when it was published in 1985. Well into the 90's, introductory books in English for the new or prospective Western muslim were often limited to titles like "What Islam Is?", published in Lahore with the best of intentions. Reading the book today it is easier to pick out flaws. In particular, the author is committed to a binary of a harmonious, God-centered traditional existence as opposed to corrupted secular modernity commencing somewhere around the Enlightenment (see King of the Castle for a lot more of this). That commitment sometimes manifests as a kind of reverse orientalism, conjuring a static, unchanging golden Islamic past that then must be defended with strenuous apologetics; and sees nothing of value in the constant godless upheavals of the present, as in the image of young Muslims being corrupted by Western higher education ("passport Muslims", he sighs). I'm sympathetic to and see a lot of religious support for the idea of human spiritual decline from the point of Revelation to the End of Time, but the line graph of that would be a pretty messy seven-dimensional spiral chute and not a simple linear function from the Good Ole Days Plateau to the Trench of the Horrid Present. Strategies for adapting as a muslim to the challenges of the modern or post-modern age are needed much more right now than harkening back to the way things were before humanity left the farm, moved to the city and went to college.

Written 35 years after the author embraced Islam, the book is in some part a record of a convert situating himself within the faith. The dialog with Christianity throughout the book is fascinating, and I got a strong sense of how his Christian origins have lingered with him, if only as doubts to have overcome or questions to have answered. The thorough grounding in Christian theology and the tenderness and grace in highlighting similarities and differences between the faiths are great strengths of the book. The sensitivity and respect he shows the Christian outlook is a great example to other converts in how to come to grips with their origins. Who we were is part of who we are, and being comfortable in yourself means coming to terms with that. Only with our muslim children will that background attenuate or transform or disappear, and for that reason I am so curious to hear and read the voices of the children of our celebrated convert scholars, convert imams and convert da'eens, may I live long enough to do so.

Islam and the Destiny of Man is available for borrowing at the Islamic Information Centre lending library in Kuching. Contact Ms Dayang Dahlia at 082-418562 for details.

Yorgos says

The author writes a magnificent work on Islam, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. He writes with clarity, warmth, authority, musicality. He is able to transmit the message of Islam as he sees it, using the historical events of early Islam to present his insight and understanding. He writes with intellectual understanding and human warmth.

Fanim says

An excellent read. Provides a comprehensive overview of Islam and its principles.

Ali Sarikaya says

A must Read book

Uwais says

This book is one of the most influential and genuine works of the century. The book is as unique as its author. although the book is originally in essence an introduction to Islam, I feel it manages to do much more and definitely, without a shadow of doubt qualifies in the "Book of the books" list. This book is a legacy for posterity and an example of how magnificent British Islam can get. If past Muslim scholars would refresh and polish their intellects with Ibn Khaldun's "Muqaddimah" and Shah Wali Allah's "Hujjat", English speaking students have no excuse in doing the same with this book. A must read for the serious minded. Absolutely timeless.

Hammad Ali says

Most of the great works relating to Islam and Muslims that I've come across so far are mostly translated works. And the few that were written originally in English are mostly very simple or cover the political side of Islam written either by orientalists or Westerners who write about Islam as they're approaching something alien that needs to be handled with as much skepticism and cynicism as possible. As such in my opinion at least Islam has not fully come to the English language as of yet (but over the last 30-40 years a lot of great stuff is coming through) so to come across any great original non-translated piece of writing on Islam in English is always great to find.

In short, the book is as brilliant as it gets. Eaton is a master of English. The way he articulates his arguments, his thoughts and his ideas is nothing short of brilliant. The book as such starts of with a rather academic feel and the subject matter is serious and thought provoking. But credit to Eaton's writing he makes it seem like the reader is reading a story book. The book as such takes all your conceptions and ideas about Islam whether you're a Muslim or not and throws them out the window. It makes you re-examine and look at the Divine Majesty in a beautiful way. The book questions every act of worship you do and shows you the hidden meaning behind these acts. Or in other words it shows you the Divine mercy. Overall I would recommend this book to everyone whether interested in religion or not, hopefully in the end it will get you thinking about a lot of things and will end up becoming a book that you re-visit often to find more and more hidden gems. For me really grateful to have come across this and it goes straight into my Top 10 books shelf and can't personally wait to read all his other books.

Lumumba Shakur says

This perhaps one of the most well written, insightful and captivating books that I have had the good pleasure to have read. In sum, it is an advanced introduction to Islam with a Perennialist Philosophical outlook (he probably references Schuon and Nasr more than anyone else). It is at times a novel, a metaphysical treatise

and cultural critique. I was initially disturbed by the philosophical underpinnings of the author, particularly the "universal validity of religions" of which the first quarter of the book is laden, but he won me back over with an affectionate narrative of Umar ibn al-Khattab's rule and from that point on, the few perceived flaws of the book faded away into the background.

This book is not without its flaws, however. In addition to the perennial philosophy, he makes mention of the "closure of the gates of ijtihad" (which is more of an annoyance than a serious flaw - though he manages to give a decent philosophical defense of it), his characterization of "intoxicated" Sufism is problematic AND he argues for the temporality of Hell (something which in less confusing times was considered a blatant act of *kufir*). But all of this more or less is what Perennialism is typically known for, so there is nothing new here.

Be that as it may, I strongly feel that anyone who appreciates philosophy and a critiqued defense of traditionalism (in juxtaposition to modernism) will fall in love with this book.

I initially selected this book because my referral (King of the Castle: Choice and Responsibility in the Modern World) wasn't readily on hand and after reading this, it only makes me want to read that title that much more. All that being said, I would not necessarily feel comfortable with simply handing this book over to a new convert or non-Muslim and walk away before for the reasons stated above. It is not an easy read (though it isn't obtuse either) and someone who doesn't have a strong background in orthodox theology may be convinced by some of his more unorthodox views. But considering what else is out there, a person could do a lot worse. In spite of its flaws, the eloquence and insightfulness of this book alone makes it worth reading.

Shaimaa Ali says

I want to give it more than 5 stars!

This book is a simple journey not about the author biography himself (part of his bio was already in the book introduction), but it describes the Islamic history since its beginning & its impact on the human being now. The first chapters are so equivalent to an Arabic "Seera" books just written in English with Gai Eaton's comments and his own understanding (from a Western point of view). The last two chapters are so beautiful talking about Art, Mysticism in Islam & other dimensions.

The language could be a barrier a bit, specially to get the exact Quran verse or Hadith and translate them from English to Arabic to know what he is referring to.

Worth all the time invested in it.

Jennifer says

this may be the best book I've ever read. the story of Islam, and the story of the Prophet Muhammad, is often impossible for the person reared in modernism and/or secularism to understand. modernism takes for granted that the past was not as good as the present, that human life is continually improving. secularism takes for granted that religion cannot, or should not, govern the minutiae of a person's life, that individual freedom is

the most important value.

Islam is a fundamentally different way to view reality... a story of the perennial philosophy, the way that human beings have related to their Creator since time immemorial, and yet, the sound of it always hits the modern ear wrongly. but since he speaks both languages—that of the West, and that of Islam—fluently, it's the best possible chance for the modern reader to "get" Islam, if, indeed, he really wants to. it cannot be overestimated how important this book is. it is a book written by someone who knows how to explain Islam to people who are innately hostile to it, but who do not realize they are hostile, who think they are open-minded, but who in fact stopped listening already. LOVE this book.

Murtaza says

There are two books I would recommend to any non-Muslim with an interest in learning about Islam. The first is Major Themes of the Quran by the Pakistani-American scholar Fazlur Rahman, and the second is Islam and the Destiny of Man by the Perennial philosopher Gai Eaton. I read this book many years ago in my youth, but was not really ready to absorb its lessons at the time. I'm glad I revisited it, because this is a beautiful and succinct encapsulation of the Islamic worldview. While many of its themes were familiar to me, Eaton's elegant restatement of Islam as a totality is very worth reading for anyone seeking to learn for the first time, or those simply looking to do *zikr* (remembrance) through study.

While there is too much of value in this book to restate in a short review, a few key points bear mentioning. As Eaton explains, Islam's relationship to preexisting cultures is one of incorporating and continuing with all that comports with its view of reality, while shearing away that which conflicts. Islam is also in his view a continuation and restatement of the perennial truths contained in previously revealed traditions, rather than being *sui generis*. Islam's view of nature is that it points towards the divine, though modern man is no longer capable of understanding symbols and thus fails to see this. The beautiful analogy he uses is that of a clock face, which contains vital information, while dissecting and tearing apart the clock itself (as scientism does to nature) would never be able to tell one the time. Eaton also explains the Islamic attitude towards life, both in joy and suffering, which reflects the Muslim attitude that all that is good in the world is a temporal gift from God and that Earth was never intended to be a paradise. Suffering for a Muslim was always understood as constituting a part of God's plan. This makes it bearable for one who is a believer in the unseen, whereas for the profane it remains an unbearable torment since it is essentially meaningless and thus "should" have been otherwise. Eaton also makes a good point that ordinary Muslims understand the concepts of Paradise and Hell on different levels, but it doesn't matter whether they take it literally or not as long as their understanding reflects the underlying true realities. The only real problem is when they cease to believe in anything and spin into a total void of confusion and nihilism, as many have today due to lack of knowledge.

Eaton goes over Islamic history from the period of the Rashidun Caliphs through to the Abbasids. As he describes it, the primordial history of Islam was always intended as a symbolic message to mankind rather than as merely "events." Human beings after all comprise a part of nature and their actions and behaviors contain messages for those who reflect. Nonetheless the apparent chaos of early Islamic history at the elite level was actually quite removed from the lives of ordinary people of the era, reflecting the distance which pre-modern states had from the actual societies that they governed. Those who sought power at the highest levels took a gamble with their lives, whereas ordinary people whose names we will never know relied on grassroots social structures to govern their lives. Their experiences are not recorded in any epic histories yet they are the ones who built the social and ethical scaffolding that comprise the world of Islam, not the many caliphs, kings and princes who came and went with their dramas.

It is fascinating to reflect that for over a thousand years a network of societies were governed under a set of metaphysical tenets which people saw as totally natural, appropriate and useful and that no one felt the need to change until they were (partly) obliterated by the onslaught of Western modernity. Islam still persists today but it seems to do so in an increasingly confused manner for many people, Muslims included, because they have lost sight of its true depth. Perhaps Eaton's most powerful point in the book is that throughout its history the religion of Islam has been repeatedly revived by the arrival of outsiders into its fold. It started with the Arabs, then came the Persians, Indians, Turks, Africans and so forth, with each new wave of converts bringing with them a renewal of understanding and purpose. In recent decades we have had Western converts like Eaton and many others to thank for once again powerfully reminding us of the ultimate truths expressed by the religion, reviving its vital force and powerfully explaining its continued necessity to modern people. This book is an important read for anyone seeking to genuinely understand and it is a potent antidote to the rampant misconceptions which exist about Islam today, both among Muslims and non-Muslims.

Tim says

Eaton describes himself in a way that was immediately identifiable, as a Muslim who came to the faith "through intellectual conviction and with a belief in the transcendent unity of all revealed religions". This transcendent unity in Islam, which is known through the principle of Tawhid, is a natural extension of the Oneness of Allah. To state this principle as an article of faith and worldview is one thing, to realize its full implications is quite another - particularly for the Western mind.

"Islam is the religion of all or nothing, faith in a Reality which allows nothing to have independent reality outside its orbit; for if there were such a thing, however distant, however hidden, it would impugn the perfection and the totality of that which alone is." This is a fundamental re-thinking of identity structures, an entirely new paradigm from a Western mindset. Islam identifies through religion, as nothing is outside of religion. Practice and belief are all part of one coherent structure. Everything we see, everything we think, everything we do is a reflection of our Creator, and therefore nothing is outside of the Creator's domain. As humans, our independence is there in that we are created with free will, but not there in that we are dependent upon the Creator for that free will.

Nonetheless, we are still human, and therefore subject to imperfections as humans. These imperfections are seen in how we follow the divine "law" (which is at base simply a recognition of the nature of "being"). The law is as fundamental to Islam as is belief in the ONE. The law is not a separate sphere, it is life itself. It is how the perfected life operates. It is congruent to the term "the laws of nature". There is no separation.

This can be difficult for the Western mind to grasp, as Western culture is fundamentally built on Christendom, as much as we may or may not want to admit that. Christianity has over the centuries created separate compartments for the spiritual and the mundane. This world here and now is separated - in a sense - from the spiritual in a way that doesn't make sense to the Muslim. Tawhid does not allow separation, everything is intertwined. It might be said that Western culture is only recently starting to realize this by acknowledging that "we are all one" or "we are all connected at base". Islam has long realized this, even if certain Muslims don't always live out this belief in relation to other human beings.

Eaton is not only a Western Muslim, but has a vision of where that places him in the world. He has an incredible grasp of both (generalized) the West and Islam, and knows how to communicate through both to both in a way that is crucial for understanding.

Aasem Bakhshi says

I have never read such surreal walk-through of Islamic history, law, society and arts before. In my view, this is characteristic of most perennialist literature (for instance, Frithjof Schuon, Rene Guenon and Syeh Hussain Nasr) that it drags the reader into deep and novel meanings of common concepts and cliches otherwise taken for granted. But by any means, this is not an easy read, and though these are just about 250 odd pages, the narrative requires an extraordinary attention and careful reading.

The book may fail to make much impression upon post-modernist legal mind who is adamant to seek an almost Utopian authenticity in historical and social narratives; but then one wishes while reading the book that Eaton should have provided references for all the hadith and incidents that he makes use of to build an excellent exposition of what it really means to be a Muslim.

sara says

ok this probably deserves 5 stars...but it took me FOREVER to read...not an easy read by any means..atleast not for me...but very interesting..gets better n better..esp second half of book...esp his summary of the caliphates...n the chapter on art, environment and mysticism...amazing....the man is brilliant...can NOT rush through this book..read every sentence 3 times if u have to ..its worth it :)
