

’ Αναστασίου Γιαννουλάτου, Αρχιεπισκόπου Τιράνων και
’ πάσης Αλβανίας, Ισλάμ. Θρησκευολογική επισκόπησης,
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pages.....by Maria Vaiou

The lack of studies on Islam by Greek scholars makes Yannoulatos’ book an interesting one. Yannoulatos examines the role of religion in Islam in three parts. He starts his introduction with the meaning of the term Islam,¹¹ and stresses the importance of knowing about it. He examines the nature and phases of the knowledge and investigation of Islam by non-Muslims, and looks at the existing literature on Islam. He begins the first part examining the roots of Islam in four chapters. In chapter 1, he describes the background of the development of Islam, the pre-Islamic Arabic religion —its polytheistic structure, the *Allâh* monotheistic concept, cult aspects, morals — and the Christian and Jewish influences in the form of religious streams which were incorporated in Islam.

In chapter 2, Yannoulatos describes the emergence of Islam, focusing on the early years of the Prophet (570—622 A.D.). He continues with the historiographical problems related to the study of the early Islam, the Life of the Prophet, and the Qur’ân. Yannoulatos points out that the Prophet’s migration (*Hijra*) to Medina in 622 A.D. was the turning point for the formation of the religion of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad called people to the one true God returning to the faith of Abraham (*millat Ibrahim*) and did not bring a message from a new God. In this way, though he put aside the names of Jesus and Moses invoked by the two other Abrahamic religions Judaism and Christianity, he provided a point of common approval and unquestionable authority. In addition he put the basis of the Muslim Community bonded by a common religious faith, and drew attention to traditional Arabic principles to which he gave new theological interpretation. This is reflected in the direction (*qibla*) for prayer to Mecca instead of Jerusalem. A series of rules followed which cemented the national Arabic character of the religious movement of Muhammad. The importance of the Prophet’s migration is reflected in its adoption as the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

¹ By the term Islam, Yannoulatos means the religious experience defined as ‘submission to God’ or ‘acceptance of God’s guidance’.

In chapter 3, Yannoulatos focuses on the Qur'ân, the main source of Muslim religious life, and the foundation of Islamic belief and practice. He describes its character, division (114 *suras*) dating (compilation finished in 645), stresses chronological problems related to its form, and looks at interpretative attempts. He compares the Qur'ân with the person of Christ in Christian theology as evereternal Word of God'. The Qur'ân contains the revelations received by the Prophet in Mecca and Medina, and is a treatise of prayers, summary of sacred history and basis of morality and law in Islam, and as such the first written monument of Arabic language. The Qur'ân is the main visible sign of God's presence among people in a religion that has no priests, mysteries and icons as in the Christian Church. In chapter 4, the author discusses the nature and form of the *h□adīth* (the tradition of the acts and sayings of the Prophet), and drawing on examples, he describes its use as a source for giving solutions to problems in the Muslim Community. He argues that the Qur'ân is understood under the light of the *h□adīth* and provides information about the *isnâds*(chains of authority) stressing the issue of the reliability of the historicity of names, accuracy, and the relationship between the participants of *isnâds*. He also lists the *h□adīth* in categories, and describes collections of them which influenced the development of the Islamic law.

In the second part, Yannoulatos examines the Islamic creed and ethos in four chapters. In chapter 1, he gives the basic theological lines of the Qur'ân. He stresses the 'foundations of faith' i.e. its monotheism, belief in angels, prophets, the books of prophets, resurrection of the dead, last judgment, predestination of man, and draws a schematic parallelism with Christian symbols of faith. He points that the differences between Muslim and Christian teachings are the rejection of the divinity of Jesus, negation of the term 'father' attached to God, which is related to the idea of being the son of God and the teaching of Holy Trinity, negation of the crucification, and resurrection of Christ. Some of the similarities are the special place Virgin Mary (*Maryam* has in the Qur'ân and is, in fact the only woman mentioned by name, the respect towards the person of Jesus and his work, and the Holy Spirit. In chapter 2, the author summarises the historical background of the rise of theology (*kalâm 'speech'*) and philosophy in Islam (3rd c. A.H.). He argues that the main reasons for the rise of *kalâm* were the theological and political differences of various groups in the Muslim Community, the need for spiritual defense against the polemic it faced by the Byzantines, and the penetration of Greek

thought during the ‘Abbâsid period.

In chapter 3, he explains that the Muslim faith and practice are expressed in a variety of beliefs and rituals. He describes the five duties of the Muslims, *shahâda* (confession of faith), *sâlat* (prayer), *zakât* (legal alms), *sâwm* (fasting), *hajj* (pilgrimage), and puts emphasis on the rituals and procedures used during each practice. He also refers to other festivals and celebrations in Muslim religious life stressing that they aim at bringing unity to the Muslims exercising influence on them so as to submit to God’s will. In chapter 4, he discusses main moral principles focusing on family institutions, the position of women, the theory of *jihâd* etc., and points out the values of compassion, humanity, modesty, justice, among others, emphasized by the Qur’ân and the *hadîth*. Further, he explains the significance of law (called *Shari‘a*) in Islam, which defines the behaviour of men in their personal and social life. It derives from the teachings of Qur’ân, *sunna*, consensus of learned opinion (*ijma‘*), and reasoning by analogy (*qiyas*).

In part three, chapter 1, Yannoulatos draws a historical map of the main events that marked the Arabic history, and maintains that Islam passed through many stages in its development: classical period (rise of the Arabs from the 7th to 13th c.), medieval period (rise of the Mongols and Turks in the mid 13th c. to 18th c.), period of decline (end 18th c. to the beginning of 20th c.), and a new rise (after the Second World War). He also refers to the development of Islam as a world civilization, and its contribution to the history of philosophy, art, architecture, astronomy, theology, medicine, mathematics and the sciences. He examines the religious divisions in Islam, and describes the sects of Khawârij, Mu‘tazila, Murji‘a, Ahl al-madîya. In chapter 2, he focuses on the Sunnites and Shiites, their branches, sources of influence, beliefs and differences. In chapter 3, he provides a historical summary of the development of the branch of Islamic mysticism called ‘Sufism’ and his representatives.

In chapter 4, Yannoulatos describes the characteristics of contemporary Islam. He examines the internal tendencies in Islam, such as the liberal modernization movement (Sayyid Ahmad Khân, 1817—1898), reawakening of ‘Islamic Orthodoxy’ aimed at the ‘restoration’ of Islam (focuses on the ‘fundamentalist’ movements of Wahhâbî in Saudi Arabia, Mahdî in the Sudan, Sanûsî in Libya), radical reform (Turkish interpretation of Islam), and legislative adjustments. He stresses that the Muslim world witnessed a gradual increase of political power after the second world war until today, seen, for example, in the

political freedom of Muslim peoples from the colonial domination of western powers, emphasis on national identity, Pan-Islamic ideal, and increase of missionary zeal. In today's world the adaptability of Islam raises many questions, such as the direction of Islamic reform and revival, the relationship between tradition and modernization, or the role of the religious leaders (*ulamâ*) for the future of Islam. Islam, as a world religion, with a global following of 1.4 billion adherents should be of interest to all those concerned with 'foreign' religions. As Yannoulatos stresses, the understanding of the world in which we live, requires a knowledge of Islam as a prerequisite for an appreciation of our theologically and historically interconnected Judaeo-Christian-Islamic heritage.

Yannoulatos' book succeeds in enabling the readers to understand and appreciate what Muslims believe and practice. His work written in a concise, lively and accessible manner gives the reader an informative view of the fundamental role Islam plays in Muslim life. As its centre is Allah, God, its monotheism dominates Islamic practice; spreading God's will is an individual and Community obligation. The author describes the origin of the religion, its formation, sources of influence, theological development, foundations of its faith, cult life, and the significance of law imposed by the *Sharī'a*, a religion that impregnates peoples historical conscience and determines their future. Though this work is a reprint of the 1975 edition, and therefore does not contain updated references and bibliography, nevertheless it remains an important contribution to our knowledge about basic aspects of the religion of Islam. Yannoulatos uses extensive footnotes in the form of references and scientific support to the arguments developed in the text, gives the etymological meaning of Arabic terms when necessary, brings to our attention problems related to the source material for certain aspects of the Islamic history, and sheds light on contradictory issues by expressing his own interpretation. Yannoulatos' book is a comprehensive study of Islam and its dynamic throughout the ages.

