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BOOK PROFILE: SEPTEMBER 11:
RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON
THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

A profile of Ian Markham and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (eds.), *September 11: Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002. x + 292 pp. \$25.95 (paper). ISBN: 1851683089.

With the fifth anniversary of 9-11 fast approaching, and with so much having been written already on the subject, "9-11 Studies" just may prove itself a permanent heading in bookstores and college catalogues. Among the many volumes by now familiar, this one from Oxford's Oneworld Publications, compiled not long after the tragic event, proves to be one of the more penetrating and compelling analyses from a religious studies perspective.

The book is a compilation of twelve essays written by members of Hartford Seminary and as such represents a collaborative effort to address intersecting issues from ranging perspectives rather than an in-depth investigation of one particular topic. The contributors address key questions of broad-reaching concern, from the issue of violence in the monotheistic traditions to the tension that lies between the need to monitor terrorism and the duty to insure civil rights. Editors Ian Markham, author of *Plurality and Christian Ethics*, and Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations at Hartford, represent the truly inter-religious impetus of the work as a whole.

The collection begins with Heidi Gehman's descriptive account of the terrorist attack and an exposition of the urgent questions that have arisen from it. Invoking H. Richard Niebuhr's call for appropriate reflection in the time of war, Gehman makes a convincing plea for the necessity of distinguishing between terrorist acts and the dire conditions that encourage them. In line with Niebuhr, it is a call for self-analysis for the sake of lasting healing, in the midst of trial and turmoil.

Part One then begins with its proper focus on issues of cultural and social context. Abu-Rabi's own contribution is a critical assessment of modern Islamic history and a decisive call to Muslim societies to foster an environment in which

pluralistic and democratic values, rather than military authoritarianism, can flourish. For Abu-Rabi, one of the main challenges to that end is the urgent need for ongoing educational reform that encourages critical vision and scientific inquiry. Switching focus to American culture, Nancy Ammerman considers the response of churches and other religious organizations to the 9-11 attacks. Her claim is that in large part existing congregations have proven effective in helping people cope with the implications of the tragedy and have fostered the development of new forms of “religious solidarity” (e.g., shrines and vigils) beyond institutional walls. The descriptive analysis of faith-based community ministries provided by Carl Dudley concludes the section with a consideration of the myriad challenges 9-11 poses to community ministries.

Part Two’s *Theological Reflections* begins with Ingrid Mattson’s description of the “double bind” facing American Muslims, i.e., the need to defend Islam to Americans and the need to portray America in a positive light to Muslims around the world. In her contribution on emerging American spirituality, Miriam Therese Winter wonders if 9-11 will one day be considered pivotal in developing newer spiritualities of interconnectedness that may even be rightly considered “American”. Kelton Cobb’s “Violent Faith” is a sobering investigation of violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and the troubling way that violence and violent attitudes are justified by archetypal myths in scripture which are too often isolated from “conflicting narratives of divine mercy and common grace” (159). The next two contributions in this section on theological reflections look to scripture as the basis for promoting inter-religious dialogue. Efrain Agosto finds inspiration in the leadership models of Jesus and Paul, the former in his counter-establishment activities, which led him to provide relief to the suffering marginalized, and the latter, in his firm belief in accountability before God and his own zeal in spreading the gospel of peace and reconciliation. Judy Fentress-Williams highlights the importance of the Bible’s own dialogical structure as a foundation for a strong Christian commitment to inter-religious dialogue. Ian Markham continues the dialogue theme but stresses the need for a more scientific, i.e., a more criteria-based approach that goes beyond surface conversation.

Finally, Part Three opens the investigation to broader issues, which are, the editors admit, only a beginning. Jack Ammerman discusses the importance of documentation in creating record of such tragedies as the 9-11 attacks but stresses the importance of the inclusion of ephemera, especially stories that give personal witness to that record. The book concludes with a final chapter which most directly addresses the themes of the present issue of this journal. Heidi Hadsell explores the moral dilemmas and debates surrounding the confrontation of internal security and civil liberties. Her analysis is, of course, limited to those initial events that occurred soon after the attacks, but her observations continue to prompt critical reflection that is even more necessary now, nearly five years later. Hadsell insists that the time-proven practices and customs of democracy—public debate, equal treatment of all, constitutional checks and balances—remain

“the morally best, if not the most efficient way to fight terrorism” (264). But urgent questions still arise. Are these traditions of democracy being allowed to flourish under the current administration here in the United States? And perhaps, even more urgently, what happens when the democratic process elsewhere lawfully brings to leadership extremists with a documented history of terrorism?

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