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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ RELIGION

The Concept of Labor in Islam

Khalil Ur Rehman
Khaleeg Naziri, translator
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Muslims make up the second-largest religious group in the world, yet while many in the Western world have a passing familiarity with the Bible, it is a rare person who knows the basic tenets of Islam or how the Qur'an delineates life in a Muslim society. Many Muslims live in theocracies, nations governed according to religious law. In his book, *The Concept of Labor in Islam*, Khalil Ur Rehman has set out to explain how the principles of Islam's Holy Qur'an apply to labor in the twenty-first century.

Most of *Concept's* eleven chapters, such as "The Status of a Worker in an Islamic Society," adhere to the book's premise. Other chapters, however, focus on issues a non-Muslim might not think of as "labor." For example, Rehman presents chapters on the rights of children in Islam, writing about the proscription against abortion and infanticide and noting, "Islam had proscribed a comprehensive code of conduct for the treatment of children fifteen hundred years ago." There is also a chapter titled "Status of Women in Islamic Society" in which the author writes, "Woman's inferiority in Islamic Society is no more than a myth." While they seem unrelated to labor as Westerners understand the term, these chapters provide intriguing insights into Islamic societies where individual rights are determined by the Qur'an. In a secular society, of course, laws and regulations regarding labor (or women and children) are determined either by government mandate or democratic process.

The author notes that Mohammed's words on labor were simple, a fact that he came to understand thirty years ago at an international conference. There he heard an Indian Muslim quote a *hadith*, a tenet of Islam based upon the words of the Holy Prophet: "Pay the workers his wage before his perspiration dries out. Nothing else has been mentioned in this regard."

Of course, despite certain differences, every humane society views labor from some common points of view. For example, Rehman acknowledges the right to strike, in spite of some Islamic writings suggesting otherwise. For example: "Wages of a worker should be enough for his and his family's requirements of food, clothing, shelter, medical aid, children's education and other necessities…If wages are fixed according to the above principle, then there would be no protest and no strikes." As with other issues, Rehman provides a reference from the Qur'an to validate his premise.

The author may provoke criticism from some readers that he mixes religion into a secular issue. Readers should remember, however, that the author speaks to a universal issue as seen by a specific culture, one in which the Holy Qur'an carries importance equal to the combined influence of the Bible and the Constitution in the United States.

Concept can be difficult reading at times. Although the text was translated from Urdu to English by a professional journalist, numerous errors in grammar and syntax are still included. Less troubling is the lack of explanation about the honorifics attached to the name of Mohammed as the Holy Prophet (S.A.S.) or to the names of renowned Islamic scholars, philosophers, or leaders (R.A.).

Khalih Ur Rehman is the chairman of the All Pakistan Federation of Labor. The principles offered in his book are not necessarily relevant to a democratic secular society, but they provide remarkable insight into a culture few Westerners fully appreciate.

GARY PRESLEY (August 16, 2010)

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