Clarion Review

Religion

The Great Ignorance
Bulent Kuyumcu
Yasin Karayigit, translator
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Four Stars (out of Five)

The friction between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity has been chewed over by political commentators, statesmen, and diplomats for centuries. What appears to be a united front of Islamic belief to non-Muslims is not, according to Turkish engineer and businessman Bülent Kuyumcu. He takes on the question posed by Bernard Lewis in his book, What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East. "The answer," Kuyumcu writes, "…is crystal clear": Muslims worldwide have been misled, and it's time for them to open their eyes.

Turkey's history and copious quotes from the Qu'ran serve as Kuyumcu's guidelines for his discussion of why Islam is where it is today. Kuyumcu asserts that the Qu'ran was co-opted by Arabian cultures for gaining and maintaining spiritual and temporal power. He advances the theory that "for the past one thousand four hundred years Islam has not been practiced in accordance with what was dictated by the Qu'ran and by God." Kuyumcu's position is that believers need only the Qu'ran and their own minds to know how to be faithful Muslims.

Because followers are taught not to question their religious leaders, Kuyumcu warns, Islam has gone far off the path the Prophet set for believers. "Unless it changes its course," he writes, "the Islamic world will do nothing but come knocking on the West's door, cap in hand. It will not achieve anything; it will merely persist in doing what it has always done, unquestioningly, afraid of making mistakes if it leaves the well trodden path." This isn't the kind of statement Western readers expect to hear from a Muslim author; in fact, it sounds quite radical.

"Islamic practices since the death of the Prophet have taken a form far removed from their actual meaning," Kuyumcu writes. "These predominantly formalist realizations of Islamic

practice have had an effect on non-religious education in all Muslim societies and have led to the adoption of a system based on rote-learning which leaves no room for analytical skills to blossom: free-thinking is effectively outlawed." Kuyumcu believes nothing should come between a Muslim and the Qu'ran.

Compared to the cant and rhetoric from Muslim clerics claiming to know the right way to understand the Qu'ran, Kuyumcu's book is a welcome breath of fresh air. The position he takes in his book is bolstered by the fact that he isn't a cleric, just a Muslim who fears that his spiritual base has gone bankrupt and wants to help it recover. It's likely an artifact of the translation from Turkish to English that the book reads sometimes formal, sometimes informal. This only adds to its readability.

The phrase, "the great ignorance," has been used in many contexts, from economics to politics. In Kuyumcu's book, it refers to the blind faith that so many Muslims practice today, as well as that of many Christians and Jews. The back-to-basics approach is Kuyumcu's essential message. People of all spiritual paths would do well to heed it for themselves.

J.G. Stinson