

Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers

By Mohammed Arkoun

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Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers By Mohammed Arkoun

A Berber from the mountainous region of Algeria, Mohammed Arkoun is an internationally renowned scholar of Islamic thought. In this book, he advocates a conception of Islam as a stream of experience encompassing majorities and minorities, Sunni and Shi'a, popular mystics and erudite scholars, ancient heroes and modern critics. A product of Islamic culture, Arkoun nonetheless disagrees with the Islamic establishment and militant Islamist groups; as a student of twentieth-century social science in the West and an admirer of liberalism, he self-consciously distances himself from Western Orientalists and Western conceptions of liberalism.This book—the first of Arkoun's works to be widely available in English—presents his responses to twenty-four deceptively simple questions, including: Can one speak of a scientific understanding of Islam in the West or must one rather talk about the Western way of imagining Islam? What do the words “Islam,” “Muslim,” and “Qur'an” mean? What is meant by “revelation” and “tradition"? What did Islam retain from the previously revealed religions—Judaism and Christianity? What did it retain from the religions and customs of pre-Islamic Arabia? In answering these and other questions, Arkoun provides an introduction to one of the world's great religions and offers a biting, radical critique of Islamology as it has been practiced in both East and West.This is a book for the beginning student of Islam and for the general reader uneasy with media images of Islam as a monolithic, anti-Western, violence-prone religion. It is also a book for specialists seeking an entré into Arkoun's methhodology—his efforts toapply contemporary thinking about anthropology, philosophy, semiotics, history, and sociology to the Islamic tradition and its relationship to the West. It is a book for anyone concerned about the identity crisis that has left many Muslims estranged from both a modernity imposed upon them and a tradition subverted for nationalist and Islamist purposes.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal
The Judeo-Christian West and the Muslim East, Arkoun says, must begin a truly constructive discourse based on mutual respect instead of indulging in nationalist politics and fundamentalist polemic. On the basis of similar religious teachings, for instance, Arkoun invites us to create a joint theology of divine Revelation and the Word of God. Moreover, a common contemplative tradition already exists on which to build a shared spirituality. A partisan of liberal thought, Arkoun criticizes politicians who use religion for state goals, as well as religious leaders who seek political power. This insightful work is full of useful suggestions for opening intellectual discussions between the West and the Muslim world. Arkoun expects his readers to be conversant with religion, intellectual history, and European philosophy. Recommended for academic libraries.
James F. DeRoche, Alexandria, Va.
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