

Tarek Fatah, *Chasing A Mirage. The Tragic Illusions Of An Islamic State*. Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd. 2008. Reviewed by Donald Goertz.

For most Canadians the word “Muslim” conjures images of fiery clerics denouncing the West/Christianity or a mob of angry protestors shouting, throwing and just on the verge of anarchy. We tend to be presented with these images of extremes by our media. The “Clash of Cultures” is a popular concept, one with significant currency in our church communities. Polarizations such as this generate fear, media and money. For those of us who want to live out the presence of the Kingdom, Islam is one of our great challenges. We have Muslim neighbours. Most do not seem to be like those people seen on the news. But we assume the stereotypes. So how do we make sense of these large communities who now live in Canada? How do we begin to build relationships and establish meaningful dialogues? Here Tarek Fatah is helpful.

Fatah is an alternative Muslim voice, dedicated to helping people understand his communities. Fatah, the host of the TV show, *The Muslim Chronicles*, is a regular participant in media discussions of Islam. His book, *Chasing A Mirage*, is an attempt to foster a new way of living in Canada for Muslims. For non-Muslims it is also a very helpful entry point into the intricacies of the history and divisions of Islam.

This book is one that I can not recommend highly enough. I consider it a must read for every Canadian Christian who is serious about the *Missio Dei*. It first of all provides a good history of Islam from the death of the Prophet to the end of the Caliphates. This is a crucial period for us to get our minds around. It is absolutely central to the identity of Islam. It was during this time that the religion received its structure and began to work out how it would relate to the various states in which it held sway. Fatah’s history is both very readable and, for those with no real understanding of this story, it is a great entry point. He carefully walks the reader through the intrigues, struggles and divisions of those early years, taking the necessary time to provide the background and definition needed for understanding. It is very important for all of us to begin to understand the variety in the Islamic community. Only in this way can we start meaningful dialogue. And it has the advantage of being written by a practitioner.

Fatah does have an agenda. Here his discussion of the current context, beginning with the birth of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and the ability of this Arab version of Islam to force its cultural expressions and values on other Islamic communities is an important insight for a non-Muslim. This book will introduce you to the people whose names we hear in news reports and help you understand the nuances of their beliefs. I have found that this allows me to understand what I hear in a very different way. Most importantly, Fatah is arguing for a separation of religion and government as foundational to the vision of the Prophet. He is arguing for an Islam which is open to and part of a secular, democratic state. His group, the Muslim Canadian Congress, is a moderate voice on the Canadian religious landscape.

Few reading this review will have anything beyond a cursory understanding of Islam. This is tragic. Reading Fatah’s work is the first step to beginning to rectify this problem.