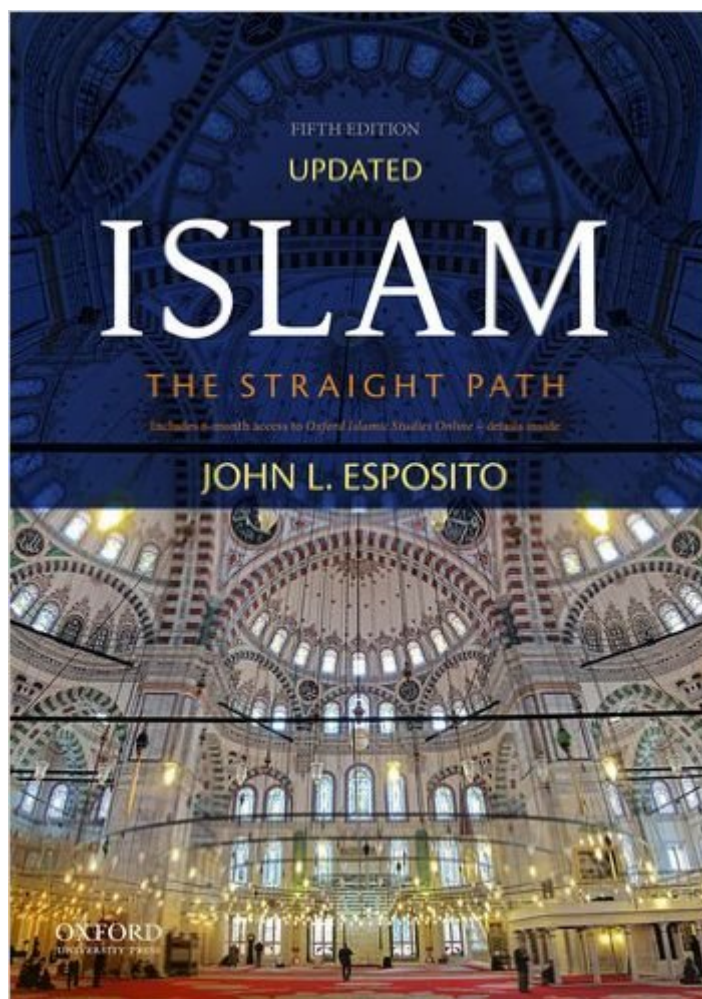


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Islam: The Straight Path



Synopsis

This exceptionally successful survey text introduces the teachings and practice of Islam from its earliest origins up to its contemporary practice. John L. Esposito, an internationally renowned expert on Islam, traces the development of Islam and its impact on world history and politics. Lucidly written and expansive in scope, *Islam: The Straight Path, Updated Fifth Edition*, provides keen insight into one of the world's least understood religions. It is ideally suited for use in courses on Islam, world religions, comparative religions, and Middle East history and culture. A FREE 6-month subscription to Oxford Islamic Studies Online (www.oxfordislamicstudies.com), edited by John L. Esposito, is included with the purchase of every new copy of this text.

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Customer Reviews

Most westerners equate Islam with terrorism. The reason is simple: Muslims rarely make the evening news unless engaged in hijackings, suicide bomb attacks or bloody confrontations with Israelis or with their co-religionists. In this 3rd edition of his book on Islam, John Esposito does much to correct this and other pervasive misconceptions surrounding this great world religion. Esposito traces the historical development of Islam from its genesis with Muhammad and the Quran, through the great ages of Islamic fluorescence and expansion-- the Umayyad (661-750) and Abbasid (750-1258) caliphates -- right up to the modern period, when "neorevivalists" struggled to reconcile the fundamental principles of Islam with secular and western-dominated contemporary life. Along the way, Esposito elaborates the basic tenets of Islam, describes the great Muslim thinkers and their ideas and explains clearly the basic interpretations and movements (e.g., Shiism,

Sufism) which have animated the development of the Muslim religion over the centuries. He also describes the different turns Islam has taken in different political contexts (contrast secular Turkey with the theocracies of Saudi Arabia and the Sudan). The picture of Islam which emerges from Esposito's treatment is one of considerable complexity, yet always anchored in the fundamental principles adumbrated in the Quran. *Islam: The Straight Path* is perhaps the best introduction to Islamic belief and history in print. The 250 page text is accompanied by a bibliography and a helpful glossary. This book is highly recommended for students being introduced to Islam and its history and, indeed, for anyone interested in learning something of the world's second largest religion.

The Straight Path is a straightforward and accessible historical introduction to Islam theology, politics, and law. John Esposito, the author, begins with Muhammad and the Quran, basic Islamic dogma, and the creation of the Islamic community. He then sketches the history of the Islamic world in the medieval period, covering the Umayyads, the Abbasid Caliphate, the Crusades and the later Islamic empires, which are Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal. Some of the divisions within Islam are the Sunni/Shia split, the Ismailis, the Druze and the diversity of its mystical and legal traditions. Next, Esposito explains Islamic theology and law in depth. Medieval theological conflicts centered on the relationship of faith, the status of grave sinners, and the connection between the absolute power of God and human free will. An essential figure was the tenth century synthesizer al-Ashari, whose followers became the leaders of the dominant school of Sunni theology. The five pillars of Islam are the professions of faith, prayer, almsgiving, the Ramadan fast and Hajj; the pilgrimage to Mecca. Finally, Esposito also touches on family law - divorce and inheritance, the relation between customary practice and Quranic prescription by showing the rules about veiling and seclusion, Sufism and Shia differences. With its primarily historic approach, *The Straight Path* only succeeds to give a feel for the role Islam plays in the lives of particular believers. Overall, *The Straight Path* works well, giving a moral feel for Islam's ancient depth and geographical reach.

I had to read this book for a class in university, and I found it to be extremely helpful and enlightening. It really gives the reader a sense of what true Islam really is. I highly recommend this book to those who are interested in understanding Islam as a religion.

This book is by far the best introductory text on Islam that I have encountered. The important thing to keep in mind is that it is an introductory text, and its function as such should be kept in mind. The book provides an excellent overview, broken down into 6 different issues/subjects of the Islamic

world, and the text is further broken down into clearly delineated and manageable chunks, just as an introductory text should be. Especially good is the elegant and concise way in which the history of the beginnings of Islam are laid out. Perhaps less strong is some of the discussion of the different ways that Muslims have approached the issue of reforming Islam, which I found to be repetitive and vague at the same time. One person was disappointed that the author often mentions a lot of names and concepts, and then doesn't describe them much. Well, that is the PURPOSE of an introductory text, to introduce people to ideas that they can then pursue further in specialized texts if they are interested. Similarly, why would one expect to find information on minority non-Islam religious groups or the African slave trade in a book about Islam? The former would be found in a comparative religion text, the latter, perhaps in a history of Islamic people, but not an introductory text on Islam.

As usual John Esposito does not disappoint. He is thorough and fair. Definitely a must read book if you want an objective and unbiased look at Islam—the religion of over one fifth of the world population. In my opinion it's worth taking an unbiased look at a religion which the Guinness Book of World Records rates as the fastest growing religion in the world by the number of conversions.

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