

## Commendatory Preface by Barbara Castelton

Luis Alberto Vittor's *Shi'ite Islam: Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy* provides a privileged and sublime view into the core and essence of Shi'ism as well as the early history and development of Islam. Written for a Western audience, it restores Shi'ism to its rightful place as a fully-fledged aspect of Islam, rather than as a rebellious offshoot which does not adhere to core Islamic beliefs and standards. In this task, the author's analysis of Islam and the meaning of sect and schism went the full distance in establishing Shi'ism's complete legitimacy.

Further, the author takes the reader back to the birth of Islam and the profound influence of the Prophet Muhammad to demonstrate the partnership he intended to create between the secular and spiritual lives of Muslims via the *wilayah* or guardianship of the correctly appointed Imam. While not a Muslim myself, I could sense the generations' long frustration of those who believed that the very trajectory of Islam was altered by the ego/tradition driven actions of a few powerful men.

Analogy is perhaps the most eloquent means of describing what Shi'ah Muslims believe happened with the appointment of Abū Bakr, instead of 'Alī, to the Caliphate. If a rocket is intended to land on a certain lunar crater 238,856 miles from Earth, the calculations must be precise to a ten-thousandth of a fraction. Any slight variation will mean that not only will the spacecraft not land on the right spot, but it may miss the moon entirely. I believe that the Prophet Muhammad's designation of 'Alī as his successor was based on just such infinitesimal calculations; a complete knowledge of the Qur'ān and its divine message as well as a realization of human frailty.

**The appointment of 'Alī was meant to inhibit the incursion of human ego into the burgeoning acceptance of the Qur'ānic message. When that did not occur, the human manifestation of Islam altered. The message and means remained pristine and perfect, but human interpretation was clouded by personal interests and a reluctance to release power.** This volume offers a clear and rational look at events, ideas, and the essence of Muhammad's intentions. For believers and non-believers, it is an authoritative source of arguments rarely heard. As such, it is a gift to a more complete understanding of this world-class religion and the place of Shi'ism within it.

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