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Luis Alberto Vittor's Shī ite Islīm: Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy addresses many essential issues concerning the split between the followers of Ahlul Bayt and the followers of ahl al-sunnah.

Transcending the historical, the author focuses on ahistorical aspects in the genesis of adherence, stressing the esoteric foundation of Shī't Islīm, as opposed to the exoteric foundation of Sunnī Islīm which forces it followers to find spirituality in various Sīfī orders.

Vittor's book challenges the prevailing view among Western academics, namely, the contention that Shelite Islem is "heterodox" while Sunne Islem is "orthodox." He contends that there is nothing non-orthodox or un-orthodox in Shelite Islem, since the very principles that give life and identity to Shelite Muslims are deeply rooted in the Sunnah of the Prophet and the Twelve Imems.

According to Vittor, definitions such as "orthodox" and "heterodox" are misnomers when applied to Islem: they are Western impositions on an Islemic construct which are entirely false. As the author explains, if one respects the meaning of the word "orthodox," which implies adherence to a specific set of beliefs and instructions, Shelite Muslims are as orthodox as Sunne Muslims. The book challenges the common misconceptions of Western academics, their bias towards Islem, and their tendency to interpret Shelite Islem through Sunne lenses.

Unlike polemical publications dealing with the Sunn®-Sh®® debate, the work does not belittle or put down the followers of *ahl al-sunnah*. The author explores Sh® ite Isl®m from within and examines the religious tradition on its own terms. As a result, he has produced a work of great critical importance, revealing the spiritual depth of Sh® ism to which many Sh® ites are oblivious.

As one reads the work, one develops a greater understanding of the inner meaning of essential elements of Shī ite faith and religious practice. The work is sure to have great resonance during the month of *Muharram*, a time when Shī is more or less viewed through Sunnī lenses. When Shī ites commemorate the martyrdom of Imī Husayn, they are often assaulted with questions and criticism.

Unless the spiritual foundations of Shi ism are fully understood, Shi ite efforts are expended to rebuttal at best or attack of *ahl al-sunnah* at worst. Both a defensive and an aggressive approach to inter-

Islemic understanding are futile and reinforce the status quo. The solution to any Sunne confusion regarding 'shere' will not be resolved in the realm of the political, but in the sphere of the spiritual. As Vittor's work reveals, the sweetness of Shere is to be found in the inner meanings of the outer rituals.

The chapter on Mukhter al-Thaqefe is particularly revealing. Although I.K.A. Howard has provided a good historical rendition of Mukhter in *al-Serat*, Vittor captures the sense of spirituality emanating from his uprising. In the words of Howard Zinns, there is a certain moral and spiritual outrage which is nurtured through the sort of awareness that develops over time, a sense of indignation that is missing at least today. As one reads Vittor's work, one senses the deep suffering and empathy that She'ites feel for the suffering of *Ahlul Bayt*.

Although not a survey of the Shelite faith, Vittor's work covers the spiritual foundation of the Imemate to a sufficient degree. His work also touches upon the treatment of the Shelite minority in the face of oppression, and the role of silent and quietist revolution as a means of protest, an approach which stands in stark contrast to the violent modes of expression and opposition seen in the Muslim world today.

Rather than radicalize, Vittor's work helps to sensitize Sh®'ites, an achievement of incalculable importance in the aftermath of the Iraqi quagmire. These are times of reconciliation, not revenge. These are times of unity and not division. Despite the dark moments that Sh®'ites have suffered, and continue to suffer, the tide of time is changing in the right direction, and many people are realizing the spiritual force of Sh®'ite Isl®m, made obvious through its supplications, prayers, and salutations, as well as its Qur'®nic commentaries and scholarly works, all of which are all grounded in spirituality.

Luis Alberto Vittor's *Sh* ite *Isl* m: *Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy* is a very concise book, and the greater portion of the work consists of highly informational scholarly notes making it an easy read for the novice or even the beginner. Due to its academic value and accessibility, its intellectual integrity, and its call for Isl mic unity, we tremendously recommend this book, and hope it will be largely disseminated for the purpose of *dawa'h* and *tabl gh*.

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