

## THE FUTURE OF ISLAM

Lucia Vanková\*

---

ESPOSITO, L.: *The Future of Islam*. OXFORD University Press, 2010, 234 p.  
ISBN 978-0-19-516521-0

---

**John Louis Esposito**, born 19th May 1940 in Brooklyn, New York City is a professor of International Affairs and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University. He is also the director of Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal center for Muslim-Christian understanding at Georgetown University. In 1988, he was elected president of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). He has served as president of the American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies. He served as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy from 1999 to 2004 and he is a member of the World Economic Forum's Council of 100 Leaders and the High Level Group of the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations. A recipient of the American Academy of Religion's 2005 Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion and of Pakistan's Quaid-e-Azam Award for Outstanding Contributions in Islamic Studies, in 2003 he received the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University Award for Outstanding Teaching. Esposito is the author of *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*, *The Oxford History of Islam*, *The Islamic World: Past and Present*, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*.

Book starts with single statements about 9/11 and we can assume them as a change. **Esposito** offers brilliant thoughts that were not spoken yet, he wrote facts that were just somewhere behind us. After 9/11 the world has changed, it has changed to a century led by USA and its war against terrorism, we know that, but author asks why this happened and what went wrong when we can

---

\* Mgr. Lucia Vanková is an internal Ph.D. student at the Department of Security Studies, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, e-mail: lucia.vankova@umb.sk.

observe two violent lines, meaning anti-Americanism across Muslim world and Islamophobia.

Why 9/11 is meant as an act of Muslim world and not just fundamentalist minority and why any other violent act of Christianity or Judaism, in spite of the fact that we know very well that they existed, were not labeled this way?

Chapter 1: *The Many Faces of Islam and Muslims*. The strongest idea of this part of the book is directed to various forms, sights or approaches to Islam and its existence. Critics are saying that Islam is not compatible with democracy, because most of the Islamic countries are authoritarian limiting civil society, but on the other hand, Muslims believe that preserving their tradition is essential to any further success of society.

Very interesting and maybe surprising is the part about Islam in America where we can find impressive fact from daily life, e.g. that Muslims in USA are after Jews, the most educated religious community, which can be seen as an opposite of the fact that Muslims in USA are not politically engaged, which can be aftermath or reason of feeling of exclusion.

After American status, author analyses life of European Muslim, whose conditions are worse, arising from immigrant position, limited education and European need for foreign workers. Many Muslims in Europe are trapped in ghettos, poverty and crime.

Chapter 2: *God in Politics*. Religion seems to become an effective tool for political fights, because religion is being used as a way to legitimate militants and gain of popular support. Extremists using symbolism are more than better example of mentioned fact. Religious symbolism enhances willingness to fight and die in sacred struggle. A critical issue in this part of the book was resented in the relationship of religion to violence and warfare. In general, most religions and nations are resorted to violence in their so called “just” struggles. Problem of Islam and violence can be affected by lack of a central religious authority. Existence of Muftis and fatwas – legal opinions, representing diversity and flexibility in Islam can have dangerous downsides.

Another part of the second chapter of the book deals with Wahabi and Salafi Islam, which is a quiet difficult topic, when we want to be strict, but author is giving us very useful and simplified overlook of these two important parts of Islam. The Wahabi religious vision of Islam is a very strict one, emphasizing literal interpretation of Quran and an absolute monotheism. Salafi Islam refers to the first generation of Muslims, it returns to the pristine Islam. Both terms

idealize the period of Muhammad and his Companions as a pure religious period.

Chapter 3: *Where Are the Muslim Reformers?* Third, probably the most interesting and fruitful chapter of the book is about the reform, about Islamic capability of the reform. To introduce this topic, author writes about an inevitable need in all of the religion, a need for the change, a need for the reform. The same voices are coming from Muslims aware of globalization and modernization, which are looking for a kind of Reformation. Islamic modernists argued that the decline of the Muslim community was not due to any flaw in Islam itself but rather to departure from the dynamic faith and practice of Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community. Islamic modernists focused on the compatibility of Islam with reason, science, and technology. (p.92) They call for reinterpretation of Islamic law and theology and emphasize the key method of Islamic reform, which lies in making distinction between unchanging principles and values and human interpretations or man-made Islamic laws, which have to respond to challenges and problems arising in modernity. Moderate Muslim majorities desire a potential religious, political and social change and together with Muslims from the West, who are enjoying broader religious and intellectual freedom, they can prove fresh religious interpretations of the Quran and Islamic tradition, answering eventually also the question of gender equality, human right and religious pluralism. Unfortunately, these efforts are mostly overshadowed by rhetoric or act of terrorists and by the growth of Islamophobia, the new anti-Semitism. (p.140)

Chapter 4: *America and the Muslim World: Building a New Way Forward.* Term "Way Forward" is unconditionally linked with Obama Administration and its changing approach on Arab and Muslim world after eight years of Bush presidency. Other view can be of course seen among nations, especially among people, but the general trend is to distinguish between extremism and traditions. Muslims also distinguish Americans and Europeans, whom some of them, especially extremists might hate, but we also need to know what lies between hatred and jealousy on way of life etc. Social ties are very difficult within one culture, so we have to be patient to think about it globally. Admiring democracy and its values in American model can not be probably applied in Muslim world, but on the other hand, we unconditionally see the progress in introducing different, often limited forms of democratic rule. Desire for greater political participation can be seen in many Muslim countries by incorporating partial

elections etc. To be honest, we also need to admit that most of the counties are authoritarian and eventually supported by western governments driven by self-interest.

At the end of the last chapter, author states final words and asks important question helping himself with his own impressing and experienced examples. Esposito criticises one of the greatest ironies of the religion ever, and that is the fact that Christians and Muslims believing in God and his mercy are not able to avoid harsh judgment on their neighbors and how hard it seems to overcome this and similar truths. Last lines of the book refers to the global culture of pluralism, public diplomacy and words of president Obama that America and Islam do not need to be in competition. (p.194)

The Future of Islam is undoubtedly one of the best books I have read about Islam and its recent and actual role in contemporary lives of people. Esposito wrote this book with a delicate accent concerning the detail, I suppose his aim was to provide general but serious material about how the world has changed since 9/11 and why such a process happened. On the other hand, the book is offering logical reasons and drafts for solving or consolidating the real situation. I recommend this book to the whole Academic community dealing with international relations and multicultural issues. Students as well as experts could not be disappointed by this highly professional approach used in the book "Future of Islam".