

THE *Current*

June 11, 2009

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Religious Studies Scholar Publishes Volume on Islam

Juan E. Campo, associate professor of religious studies at UC Santa Barbara, has published the "Encyclopedia of Islam" (Facts on File, 2009). It is part of a six-volume set titled "Encyclopedia of World Religions." The series explores the major religions of the world, emphasizing the living faiths and their historical and social backgrounds. Other volumes cover Buddhism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Protestantism.

"The challenge was to figure out what to include in a single-volume work," Campo said of the project. "An encyclopedia is based on the ideal of comprehensiveness, but you have to draw lines about what to include even if you have a multi-volume project in mind." Equally challenging, he noted, was the task of thinking beyond academic contexts and cultures and imagining what a reader who does not have significant background in Islam would find interesting. While he wrote the majority of the articles, he did solicit contributions from a number of faculty and advanced graduate students involved with Middle Eastern studies at UCSB.

The series is designed to appeal to high school and community college students, as well as to the general public, and each volume includes approximately 600 entries that explore the theological concepts, personalities, historical events, institutions, and movements that helped shape the history of each religion and the way it is practiced today. In the volume on Islam, Campo covers topics as varied as Akbar, anti-Semitism, colonialism, fatwa, Malcolm X, Sufism, and women. He has separated

his study into four areas: Islam as the religion of Muslims; Islam as it relates to other religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism; Islam as a civilization; and Islam and the contemporary world.

"I selected topics that examine key concepts and doctrines, historical figures, beliefs, and practices that come to the fore in terms of any study of Islam," said Campo. "Then I wanted to include articles that deal with Islam as an Abrahamic religion. Several feature articles explore Muslim beliefs about Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mary, and other figures from the Bible.

"The book deals with those kinds of intersections as well as how Islamic societies of the past recognized and benefitted from the presence of different religions and nationalities. Indeed, the Sharia, or Islamic law, specifically recognized the 'protected' status of Jews, Christians, and others as People of the Book, as long as they did not seek to challenge the authority of rulers or convert Muslims," he said.

The section on Islam as a civilization focuses not on concepts directly connected to the religion, but on phenomena and events that go beyond the bounds of religious belief and practice. Among these are articles on art, architecture, agriculture, cities, food and drink, Middle Eastern languages, and literacy among Muslim populations today.

"More broadly in terms of culture, I have an article on Iranian, Indian, and Arab cinema. And then I did sort of a bridging between those different aspects and talked about representations of Islam in American cinema," Campo said. "Readers can get a good overview of how Muslims and their religion have been represented in such modern media."

To cover Islam in the contemporary world and politics, Campo included articles on individual Muslim-majority countries. These highlight when the countries were created, facts about their history and demography, how their governments are organized, and the role of religion in each one. The encyclopedia also features articles on Islam in the United States and Latin America, the Arab-Israeli conflicts, the Gulf Wars, Usama bin Laden, and al-Qaida.

"To keep the articles succinct yet comprehensive proved to be quite a challenge," said Campo, who spent five years producing the encyclopedia. "Some articles, such as those on philosophy, soul, and spirit also proved challenging in terms of making them accessible to general readers."

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