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Johnston David L., *Muslims and Christians Debate Justice and Love*, Equinox,
Sheffield-Bristol 2020, 193 pp. Reviewer: Martin Awaana WULLOBAYI

The book *Muslims and Christians Debate Justice and Love* is authored by David L. Johnston, who is a professor of Islamic Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and a visiting Scholar at the Near Eastern Languages and Civilization Department of the University of Pennsylvania. He has published numerous articles and papers in scholarly journals on a variety of topics such as Muslim-Christian relations, ecology, human rights, doctrine of creation and humanity, in addition to the book under review, published as one of the series of Comparative Islamic Studies, is Earth, Empire and Sacred Text: Muslims and Christians as Trustees of Creation (Equinox, London 2010). This important piece of research about the deliberation of the virtues of justice and love by Muslims and Christians makes for interesting reading, drawing as it does upon inspiration from two recent works of philosopher Nicolas Wolterstorff and the Common Word letter spearheaded by the Islamic initiative in 2007. It will be essentially helpful for those interested in Muslim- Christian dialogue as well as scholars engaged in comparative religious studies.

In his book, Johnston draws his readers’ attention to the Muslim-Christian concept of justice and its relation to love. From the outset his readers are made aware that ‘justice’ in this context is neither retributive nor procedural nor distributive justice, but rather primary justice. In other words, it is justice grounded in the inalienable rights that everyone possesses as human being. To this effect, the author argues on the basis that justice and love are both complementary and inseparable. He contends that justice concerns respect and care for the rights and dignity of every human being based on the fact that each one is created in the image of the one God. In essence it is to “love your neighbour as yourself” (p. 3). He comes to the point that if mercy and compassion are the best virtues on which to base a fruitful Muslim-Buddhist dialogue, then justice and love, will better strengthen a Muslim-Christian conversation.

Although the book is divided into seven chapters, each chapter begins with sample of case-studies of injustice, all involving the most vulnerable of human being. Chapter One which is the Introduction offers the highlights of the book, looking at issues around the centrality of justice in both Islam and Christianity.

In discussing ‘why justice and love?’, he highlights a clear interconnection of concepts and values between justice, love, forgiveness and mercy. He picks up another argument from Nicolas Wolterstorff on how justice and love must be paired. The only exception is the second chapter, which is on the case study of racial injustice in the United States. The author tries to avoid discussions that bog down the theory of justice and rights. In examining the legacy of the United States especially on racial justice, he reviews what could be said on racial injustice in the Slavery narratives, giving a first-hand account of the African American who experienced slavery. The author provides different views and voices by citing both Muslim and Christian materials. For instance, he not only examines the work of a Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung and his study on the structural and cultural violence, but also considers ‘Malcolm X and the Black Muslim hunger for healing’ (p. 21). In the same vein, he presents Martin Luther king Jr., on ‘the Beloved Community and Healing’ (p. 24). At the end, the author draws on the idea that the cultural violence in black communities is certainly a breakdown of love and justice (p. 28).

Chapter three on “Justice as respect for human Rights” (p. 33), sets up the basic argument of the rest of the book looking at the issue of “Justice and the Law” and “Justice as Rights”. The author begins with the case study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He points out the injustices committed in the Occupied Territory. Against this background, however, the reader is made to understand justice as an inherent right. Justice is about primary justice, about rights that belong to all human beings. He posits that justice as a right is articulated by many contemporary scholars on both sides of the spectrum. Providing detailed examples, he makes references to justice in the Hebrew Bible and also points to the notion of justice as respect for the rights of all people.

Chapters fourth and five examine the theme of justice as it is connected to Šarī‘a which Muslims regard it as the revealed path to a righteous and just society. He reviews, in chapter four, a series of various reformist views touching on justice and objectives of Šarī‘a. The author underlines the divergent and convergent views of a number of scholars: a self-taught Egyptian scholar, Jamal al-Bana, who saw justice as one of the main objectives of God’s revealed laws: another is a leading Muslim reformist legal scholar, Muhammad Hashim Kamali, who observes that God’s law could enable Muslims jurists to renew Islamic jurisprudence expressly in the service of justice and human rights; as well as Tariq Ramadan on ‘Justice and pluralism’. While chapter four looks at reformist views, in chapter five the author discusses the traditional view of Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, in the light of his gradual embracing of what the author calls the maqāṣidī movement (p. 97), although as a starting point he discusses al-Qaradawi’s affirmation of the Egyptian Christians’ rights as citizens alongside Muslim majority. For the author “Justice is so easily stymied, whether by discrimitary laws, or by the state’s unwillingness to enforce laws protecting minorities, or by investigating and prosecuting acts of violence against them” (p. 109).

In chapter six and seven, the author has chosen to focus on the theological perspective on God’s love and mercy, and on how He enjoins that love in human lives. Especially in chapter six, the author explores the topic on “Justice and Love” with special attention on “Prince Ghazi and the Common Word” (p. 116). Here the author starts the discussion with a case study on the violence context of Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria. Observing how both communities have forced friendships on their side, he likewise identifies how both advocated for national unity and peace. He centres on three aspects in order to tease out elements that will help in the conclusion about justice and love as seen both by Muslims and by Christians. First looking at Regensburg lecture of Pope Benedict, he then reviews the 2007 ‘Common Word’ initiative of Prince Ghazi (p. 124). Within this context he examines how Prince Ghazi’s writings can provide the space needed to discuss the theological implications of justice paired with love, and the opportunities to implement and protect rights for weak minorities (p. 138). Highlighting Prince Ghazi’s ‘Love in the Holy Qur’an’, Johnston looks out for how he could connect the two, love and justice.
In the seventh and final chapter which focuses on the Christian perspective on Justice and Love (p. 143), the author sets the tone with a case-study of injustice woven into islamophobia in the United States. He then proceeds to explore justice and love in Wolterstorffs’s works on “Justice in Love” (p. 148), and he concludes the discussion with Jesus and Paul and justice in Justice: Rights and Wrongs. Looking at justice and love as being perfectly compatible, the author ends his discussion with a fascinating dialogue on David Skeel’s approach to crucifixion as well as Mahmoud Ayoub’s theological challenge on ‘Islam and the crucifixion’.

It is an important book published at the right time to add a voice to an intriguing conversation between not only Muslims and Christians, but also other religions. Interestingly, though there are laws in society that directly or indirectly marginalize a group, hate speeches which divide and deprive humanity of all kinds of friendship and peace, the research topics discussed in Johnston’s book will be useful for reinforcing peaceful positive world view of coexistence between Muslims and Christians. Even more so, Johnston’s book provides a theological forum in the field of interreligious dialogue on justice and love both of which are complementary and inseparable, and embraced by both traditions. It is definitely interesting and worthwhile reading it.