

Islam in Our Backyard **(Tony Payne)**

The author rightly assesses that since September 11th 2001, a previously apathetic and lethargic Australia, has been awakened. All manner of mostly ill informed discussion has been taking place concerning Islam and its potential to affect our western way of life.

Tony Payne examines the diverse teachings of Islam and explains the origins of Islamic radical groups like the Taliban. He explores the religious challenge that Islam brings to westerners, not only in relation to terrorism but in how we are to deal with the larger questions of 'God' and truth.

The author invents a fictional neighbour, Michael, whom he describes as a "political secularist" with whom he discusses his research findings. He draws responses from his 'neighbour' throughout the book.

My initial reaction to this ploy was that it detracted from the otherwise authoritative nature of the book. However, it enables the reader to be presented with a perceived and fairly typical secular response to the issue of 'Islam in our Backyard.'

Payne sounds an important and significant warning concerning the suppression of debate on the truth or otherwise of religious claims. He tells of two men who ran a seminar in Melbourne about Islam and critiqued Islam from a Christian perspective. They are now facing a complaint before the relevant tribunal under the "Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act".

Payne gives an example signifying the importance of being able to engage in debate about 'truth'. He quotes the Qur'an which says of Jesus '...but they killed him not nor crucified him...' In fact the Qur'an categorically contradicts the New Testament in the matter of Jesus' death.

On p109 Payne says "Without the death of Jesus Christianity is next to meaningless – but if Jesus did in fact die then Islam is false".

Obviously the truth lies in one statement or the other – both cannot be true.

Payne, in my view gives as complete a picture as is possible of Islam and its many faces. He points out that Muslims see the meaning of 'jihad' in several ways. Some militarily, some politically, nevertheless he says they are "different aspects or applications of the one idea: that the world and all the individuals in it, should submit to Allah and his just rule".

Payne also appears to have a good understanding of where most Westerners stand. On p133 he says that Muhammad found the cross offensive. He continues: "People find it offensive today for different reasons. It seems passe', old-fashioned, barbarous, irrelevant – whatever. But that it might be true and that it might be the answer we don't stop to consider."

The book has 134 pages, I found it an easy read, it certainly presents westerners with a challenge as to why we have abandoned our Christian heritage and therefore when confronted with Islam we are so vulnerable.