

## Foreword

### An Advocate

by Principal Joy Abdul-Mohan

As the New Testament cannot be read without reference to the Old Testament, it appears that the Qur'an presumes an adequate knowledge of both, direct or filtered through the Hadith. This realization came to me during a conversation on the college verandah over coffee with Brian Arthur Brown, his wife Jenny, who is his support system in things theological and otherwise, and his mother-in-law, Lily Gosine, the matriarch of a family with Christian, Hindu and Muslim branches here on the Island of Trinidad. Trinidad is also where Judaism first took root in the Americas, among Jewish crewmembers who settled here when prohibited from returning to Spain after the third voyage of Christopher Columbus. It is in the context of this family and this society that Dr. Brown serves St. Andrew's Theological College as Professor Emeritus of Holy Scripture in our spring semester and grounds himself annually in World Religions.

It would now appear that in our Abrahamic family of scriptural resources, Islam has treasures to offer Jews and Christians in the twenty first century that may be compared to the impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the twentieth century, with an added value in that these resources relate to a living community with whom we must now engage. These are new thoughts since my own seminary days at Princeton, over a decade ago. As such ideas came flooding my way, I realized the truth of Walter Brueggemann's comment that "Brown is a responsible, reliable teacher who can help us find access to these texts." Brian Arthur Brown is an advocate for understanding among the members of what he sometimes calls "the dysfunctional family of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar."

As a vigilant womanist in the Presbyterian Church in my part of the world, I especially appreciate the rigorous investigation of the role of women in the production and dissemination of Scriptures in all three traditions as described in *Forensic Scriptures*, another illustration of some genuine new thinking by Brian Arthur Brown. To recognize the leadership role of Muslim women in Asian politics (as documented in Brown's earlier book), or their role in Scripture production, both historically and in the present, (as in this text) is not to deny the challenges women face in Islam, as elsewhere, but to provide a deepening context, as we are attempting to do in the Forensic Scriptures Conference as well. Notes from that conference brochure are included in this book as an appendix for those unable to attend.

As the principal of a seminary, I recommend that *Forensic Scriptures* be used almost jointly by three departments, in introductions to Hebrew Scriptures, Christian Scriptures and Interfaith Studies. I have every confidence that this book will find its way to both libraries and classrooms of theological institutions everywhere, and contribute to

the growing scholarship of the laity in many of our congregations, Jewish, Christian and Muslim.

As a participant in the conference launching Professor Brown's latest book, *Forensic Scriptures*, at Riverside Church in New York City in May of 2009, I took opportunities in months preceding the conference to solicit thoughts from other academics who would be participating or had an interest. Rabbi Justus Baird is the Director of the Multi-faith Center at the Auburn Theological Seminary in New York, a Presbyterian college like my own, so in the interfaith context it seemed appropriate to ask him how these things are being received by Christians. Old Testament Professor Walter Brueggemann of Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta, a frequent contributor at Princeton while I was there, has offered an articulate anticipation of the Muslim connection to Biblical studies. So it seemed only fitting to ask Professor Amir Hussain to comment on the situation as it relates to Jews, especially the Jewish students of this Muslim professor at the Loyola Marymount (Roman Catholic) University.

We dare do these things in the spirit of this book, and under the New Golden Rule for Religions presented by Brian Arthur Brown in his most recent previous book, *Noah's Other Son, Bridging the Gap Between the Bible and the Qur'an*, and in presentations to students here at St. Andrew's Theological College last year and elsewhere since then: "Understand others in the most generous spirit possible without doing violence to your own beliefs, as you would wish they might understand and support your position as generously as possible."

Principal Joy Abdul-Mohan

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*Discovering a previously unknown source of holy words is a rare, but certainly not new, event in Jewish tradition. In biblical times, the priest Hilkiah found a new scroll in the house of the Lord – probably the book of Deuteronomy, scholars tell us [2 Kings 22:8ff]. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Moses de Leon found a foundational work of Jewish mysticism, the Zohar. And in our time, Mohammed Ahmed el-Hamed, a Bedouin goat-herder, found caches of parchment in Qumran which became known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Leaving aside the questions of authorship that each of these events stirred up, we can focus on the results of each 'discovery.' For some, this newly discovered material was new information, and for others it was new inspiration.*

*Brian Arthur Brown challenges non-Muslims to see in the Qur'an a similar opportunity to discover a new source of information, if not inspiration. He challenges us with the question: what can we learn about our own religious tradition by studying the Qur'an? Because the Qur'an is the holy book of over a billion people, and because its style is quite different from most of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, taking on Brown's challenge demands of us three things: curiosity, humility, and sensitivity. Investigating another religious tradition without being threatening or feeling threatened is not so easy.*

*Auburn Seminary, a Presbyterian institution that strives to engage deeply in responsible interfaith education, is proud to have hosted the launch of Brown's previous book, Noah's Other Son in 2007. Two years afterwards, we are proud to once again launch this new work, Forensic Scriptures, with our friends at the Riverside Church in Manhattan. It is my hope that curious readers will find in this book a humble and*

*sensitive guide as they begin to learn from the Qur'an, and perhaps by doing so, discover new things about their own religious tradition and their own relationship with God.*

Rabbi Justus Baird

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*I have been glad to be introduced to Brown's work. I am only at the beginning of my attention to the Qur'an, and I suspect it is the same for many people whom Brown addresses. I have no doubt that a greater critical familiarity with the Qur'an is an urgent enterprise among us.*

*I have the glad impression that Brown is a responsible, reliable teacher who can help us find access to these texts. It will be important in time to come to be engaged with Muslim colleagues; and in order to do that, some understanding in the subject is important. Brown's work will be an important resource for that coming task.*

*I thank Brown for sharing his work with us and wish him and his readers well in moving the discussion forward to a new space where Jews, Christians and Muslims may begin to share the fruits of their separate scholarships.*

Professor Walter Brueggemann

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*I am a Canadian Muslim who teaches theology at a Catholic university in America. As such, I have experience with interfaith dialogue across the various religious cultures of North America. It is my distinct privilege to endorse and complement the*

*work of my countryman, Dr. Brian Arthur Brown, a minister of the United Church of Canada, a body with which I have had a long and fruitful association in the interfaith work which is engaging a wider and wider circle in Canada, America and much of the world in these challenging times of such great potential. Although separated by a few decades, Brian and I shared the same teachers in Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Willard Gurdon Oxtoby, both senior scholars in comparative religion and interfaith dialogue. For me, Brian captures the heart of interfaith dialogue that we both learned from our teachers: not that we seek to convert each other, but that we help each other to find what is meaningful in our own traditions of faith.*

*After reading NOAH'S OTHER SON, "Bridging the Gap Between the Bible and the Qur'an," I was among many who realized the potential for further developments in this direction and I am pleased to contribute what I can to FORENSIC SCRIPTURES, both the book and the historic conference which launches it at the Riverside Church in New York City.*

*By addressing the Qur'an as material which God may have earlier addressed to Jews, Christians, Sabians and Zoroastrians and preserved in their Scriptures, "either faithfully or in garbled form," Brian Arthur Brown has brilliantly opened up the possibility of reviewing Islamic holy writ from a critical perspective without doing violence to traditional Islamic teaching concerning the uniqueness and completeness of the Qur'an. On this basis we can make comparisons, learn from each other, and see what we hold in common without suggesting that the Qur'an is necessarily a compilation of "sources" rather than the fresh corrective and final revelation Muslims believe it to be. New levels of shared scholarship between the three branches of Abraham, Sarah and*

*Hagar's family may now be based on mutual respect for the Scriptural traditions of each, with considerable benefits to all concerned. FORENSIC SCRIPTURES represents part of the trend towards Muslim participation in the theological mainstream of North America and consequently the rest of the world.*

*As I have come to expect from a United Church of Canada source, Brian Brown's theology is both deep and generous. My Muslim sisters and brothers will find no trace of the old negative polemics in his writings. I recommend FORENSIC SCRIPTURES to all my students, especially Jewish and Muslim ones who can learn so much from each other. Of course, the book should be available in the libraries of all Christian educational institutions.*

Professor Amir Hussain