

Tariq Ramadan
The Messenger
The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad
ISBN: 9780 1410 2855 2
Allen Lane (Penguin), 2008, £8.99

If discovering another faith is best done through hearing the words of a representative of that faith, what better way to begin to understand the prophet Muhammad than to pick up a book by a devout Muslim scholar. Tariq Ramadan has studied in Cairo and Geneva, and is at present a professor in Switzerland. He is extensively involved in peace, social justice and dialogue issues, but has become something of a hate-figure among right-wing conservative Americans, which is perhaps as good a recommendation as anyone should need. This book paints a picture of Muhammad not often heard in the West: a leader who is tolerant, kind, gentle, scrupulously honest, and keenly aware of the needs of orphans and the poor. He concludes: 'Muhammad's life journey offered at every stage an existence devoted to the worship of God. The heart cannot but commune with such a being as he follows the path to freedom... The Prophet carried a universal message, both in the experience of love present throughout his life and in his reminders to people of the need to adhere to a universal ethic that transcends divisions, affiliations, and rigid identities...' This may not be the last word on Muhammad, but it is an important word to hear in these troubled times.

Nicholas Alan SSF

