

Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims. A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries* (Paternoster Press, 2005; reprinted by Regnum Books International, 2011) | 1

Mark Beaumont's work is a welcome contribution to the subject of Christian-Muslim relations which brings together medieval and modern scholarship across a yawning gap of more than one thousand years. Chapter 1 (1-11) outlines the Islamic context of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Christology. It establishes in clear terms the overlap between the New Testament and Qur'anic accounts of Christ, but also the substantial differences, notably with regard to the Christian view of Jesus Christ as the crucified Son of God. Chapter 2 (12-27) explores eighth-century examples of early 'dialogue' on Christology, including John of Damascus, an anonymous apologist for Christianity, and the Nestorian patriarch Timothy's debate with the caliph al-Mahdī. Timothy's distinction between Christ's eternal sonship and his temporal one, 'We believe that the Messiah was born of the Father as his Word and that he was born of the Virgin Mary as a man' (23), illustrates neatly the Nestorian view. The next three chapters discuss the Christology of three leading contributors: Chapter 3 (28-43) discusses the Christology of the Chalcedonian author Abū Qurra, Chapter 4 (44-66) that of the Jacobite Abū R'īta, and Chapter 5 (67-92) that of the Nestorian 'Ammār al-Baṣrī. Chapter 6 (93-112) compares the main arguments of the three authors and studies the Muslim response to them. The conclusion to Chapter 6 (111-2) rounds up the first half of the book, and paves the way for the second half, which deals with nineteenth and twentieth-century authors. Chapter 7 (113-32) discusses the contribution of the Pietistic Lutheran author Karl Pfander, and the Coptic Christian Ibrāhīm Lūqī, with Muslim reactions to their arguments. Chapter 8 (133-53) discusses the contribution of the Anglican scholar Kenneth Cragg, while Chapter 9 (154-73) tackles the works of the Evangelical writer John Hick and the Swiss Catholic author Hans Küng. Chapter 10 (174-87) studies the portrait of Jesus Christ in an Arabic harmonisation of the four gospels which was published in 1987, by the title of *Sūra al-Masūh*, followed by Chapter 11 (188-99) which discusses the contributions of the preceding four chapters together with the Muslim response they elicited. Chapter 12 concludes the volume (200-212), followed by a bibliography (213-220), glossary of Arabic terminology (221-2), and Index (223-7).

Beaumont's work has the great merit of communicating a complex theological subject to a wider audience in plain English. It disentangles the main elements discussed by medieval as well as modern contributors alike from their wider cultural contexts, thus enabling the reader to follow the main arguments made by the author. The scholarly focus on the subject will more than satisfy the specialist reader looking for a scientifically dependable analysis of the subject, but might disappoint the wider readership attracted to this field from the broader angle of Christian-Muslim interaction. The work concentrates on Christian presentations of Christ to Muslims, and the mainstream Muslim responses these elicited. Given the interest of

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the subject for ongoing dialogue between Christianity and Islam, perhaps the author could have invested a bit more in transforming the work from a dissertation into a book reaching a wider audience. An additional bibliography would help the reader contextualize the subject against the wider background of Christian-Muslim relations, from which the subject itself cannot be completely isolated. In particular, the link between the first half of the work (Chapters 2 to 6), which discusses the early medieval contributions, and the modern writings discussed from Chapter 7 on, could have been strengthened. The brief overview of the whole period from the ninth to the nineteenth century (113-6) is perhaps the book's weak point, in that it does not provide the reader with vital clues on the process of cultural transmission across these ten centuries or so.

There are various ways in which a better linkage could have been created. Perhaps the most controversial position discussed in the book is John Hick's reductionist assertion that the single 'instance of direct disagreement' between the two religions is the subject of Christ's crucifixion (159-60). The Qur'anic view (4:157-9) that Christ's crucifixion 'was made to appear to them', but did not actually take place, was shared by several heterodox Christian movements. Christians are encouraged by Hick to put aside this 'historical truth' if this helps them work with Muslims to achieve the common goal of salvation. The stumbling block created by the Muslim denial of the crucifixion also featured prominently in medieval and early modern Christian-Muslim exchanges. A discussion of parallel medieval examples of the rejection of what, for orthodox Christianity, is a central tenet, would provide the reader with a very useful key to bridge the chronological gap of nearly one thousand years. The author's success in showing the remarkable dialogue which emerges between the authors of the 800s and those of modern times, makes it all the more important to locate other voices in between, which are here left silent.

It is indeed eye-opening that issues which demanded so much creative attention from early medieval writers, would engage the powers of modern authors in no less critical terms. The author is fully aware of the challenges inherent in bringing these two major faiths in closer dialogue, and in his conclusion indicates that the 'standoff' over Christian-held beliefs in the incarnation, and its rejection by Muslims, constitutes the 'biggest gap between Christians and Muslims' (210). He suggests that Muslims ought to develop 'a more dynamic concept of the transcendence of God', while Christians should act as 'interrogators' of that 'Islamic belief' which, in his view, would need to be brought in line with twenty-first century needs.

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Christology is thus presented as a relevant twenty-first century common ground between Christianity and Islam. The book celebrates the dialogue between these two civilizations, but in studying the creative efforts by scholars living centuries apart to make the Christian Christ recognizable to Muslims, it also underlines another dialogue, that between the early medieval and the late modern. Judaism is conspicuous by its absence in this study, but the same set of questions addressed to Muslims would make equal sense in Christian-Jewish dialogue. *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims* complements works on the Muslim response to the Gospels, and its conclusions should be read as a necessary invitation to further research and textual translation. It should find its place in the bibliography of any course studying Christian-Muslim dialogue, as indeed for programmes seeking to promote better Christian-Muslim relations.