

David Emmanuel Singh (ed.), *Jesus and the Resurrection: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts* (Oxford: Regnum Studies in Global Christianity, 2014)

The idea behind the book is to look for some common ground between Christianity and Islam to start to build a dialogue. The contributors identify both Jesus and the resurrection as possible bridges between Christians and Muslims. The idea of focusing on Jesus and the resurrection is that both religions see both Jesus and the resurrection as part of their doctrine. Jesus is a key figure for both Christians and Muslims. And some form of resurrection of all linked with the Final Judgment is also present in both religions.

The challenge is, though, that the meaning of both Jesus and of the resurrection is different for Christians and Muslims. Christians believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus *the* Christ. Muslims do not. For Muslims, Jesus is a prophet, a special prophet if you wish, but not the Son of God who died and was raised from the dead. It is not conceivable that God would have a son and that Allah would allow a prophet to be shamed and killed. So God ascended Jesus to heaven alive. He saved him from the death on the cross, by switching Jesus with someone else to die in his place a shameful death by the hands of the Jews.

I am not sure the volume achieves what it hopes for. With the exception of Haroon Laldin's essay about the Church in Pakistan, all the essays leave this reader with some doubts regarding the possibility of a dialogue, or at least they are not clear about what the authors mean by dialogue. Most of the essays present Muslim beliefs as 'stories' and 'legends', while describing Christians beliefs more like facts. The Muslim interpretations of Jesus's second coming to rectify Christians' 'errors' is presented with 'errors' in quotation marks (e.g. but not only, p. 55) as to indicate that the error is not in the Christians, but in the Muslims who see Christians in 'error'. In addition, it may be the case that Islam uses legends and stories, but it would have been clearer what such 'stories' and 'legend' mean, if the authors who use these words offered some explanation of the difference between a legend and a sacred text, between a story and something believed as a truth. Only Katherine Ann Kraft, in her essay "Why do I have to explain the doctrine of the resurrection to my friends?" makes an effort to see stories both in Islam and in Christianity. She describes the content of a parable as a story. But is the gospel, which narrates Jesus telling the parable, also a story? The same kind

David Emmanuel Singh (ed.), *Jesus and the Resurrection: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts* (Oxford: Regnum Studies in Global Christianity, 2014)

of story as the parable itself?

The categorical and irreconcilable differences are emphasized much more than the potential similarities. So every time Jesus is mentioned the emphasis is on the fact that there would be no Christianity if Jesus did not die on the cross and did not resurrect three days after it, which is what is intensely denied by Muslims (in particular, but not only, in Brent Neely and Peer Riddell's "Familiar Signs, Altered Concepts"). What kind of dialogue may one have if one of the "bridges", Jesus, is so that "the Jesus of Christianity is in many way unrecognizable in Islam" (p. 64)? David Grafton's "He Ascended into Heaven: Samuel Zwemer's Critique of Ascension and Return of Jesus on the Day of Judgment in Islam" reports Zwemer's words as: "It is the rock of Christ's Sonship which is the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence to the Moslem mind ... in fact may we not expect that if there is a nation or race on earth more inaccessible than another, more averse to the gospel, more hardened against its teaching" (p. 97). Given these "barbaric" beliefs, is there anything more than "we share a God that has positive intentions for Humanity" (p. 98-99) as a point of commonality and a spring for dialogue? What kind of dialogue can emerge if one describes the other party in this way?

And what is the difference between a dialogue and an attempt to convert? Both Christians and Muslims believe in a form of Hell. But the Muslim hell is described in this book as much worse than the Christian hell. So Christians can (should?) use this point in common to bring Muslims over to Christianity, since Christian Hell is less frightening (Theodore Gabriel's "Resurrection in Islam").

The volume can be seen as a possibly clumsy attempt by some Christians to initiate a dialogue with Islam on the similarities and the differences in their doctrines. But it feels more like a book written by Christians for Christians on the differences and the similarities of their dogmas. I am not sure the approach is the most effective to establish a genuine dialogue.

Probably because when I think of attempts at dialogues between different religions, I think more of the Dalai Lama's approach of minimizing the discourse about theological positions in favor of concentrating on the meanings of the messages that the different religions offer to someone's life.

David Emmanuel Singh (ed.), *Jesus and the Resurrection: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts* (Oxford: Regnum Studies in Global Christianity, 2014)

Share this:

- [Share](#)