

A Textual History of Christian–Muslim Relations: Seventh–Fifteenth Centuries, by Charles Tieszen, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2015, 268 pp., \$44.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4514-9026-8

Several good overviews of the history of Christian–Muslim relations have been available for some time, such as Hugh Goddard’s *A History of Christian–Muslim Relations* (2000). They describe important characters, conversations, movements, and background information. Titles of important writings are mentioned and short passages may be quoted, but they give only a brief taste of what certain authors wrote. One of the earliest such historical overviews of this writer’s acquaintance is Jean-Marie Gaudeul’s two-volume *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History* (1984). The first volume is an outline survey of the history of Christian–Muslim relations; the second is a collection of texts, which serves as a valuable supplement to volume one. In recent years, several other scholars have produced collections of primary texts in translation, which allow scholars, students, and other interested persons to read *from* important texts instead of merely *about* them.

In the book under review here, Charles Tieszen gives us one such recent collection of primary texts. They are extracts from previously published English translations of Christian and Muslim theological sources spanning the seventh through the fifteenth centuries. They include religiously apologetic and polemical texts, accounts of theological discussions, responses to theological questions, and theological treatises. The materials assembled here help the reader to experience a range of voice tones and modes of discourse.

Structurally, the book consists of an introduction, six chapters of excerpted texts, a concluding essay, a short glossary of selected terms found in the book, suggestions for further reading, and a very useful 10-page index. The six chapters are arranged chronologically. The first chapter, ‘Between Heresy, Adaptation, and the End of The World’, consists of three seventh- and eighth-century texts from early Christian responses to the rise of

Islam. Chapter 2, ‘Christianity in the Language of Islam’, contains eight eighth- and ninth-century texts that show how Islam influenced Christian theological reflection in those centuries. The third chapter, ‘Refuting Christianity’, is a collection of eight ninth- and tenth-century Muslim texts that assess Christian doctrine and practice. Chapter 4, ‘Strengthening Defenses, Refining Attacks’, consists of four texts exemplifying Christian and Muslim theological engagement in the Western Mediterranean in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The fifth chapter, ‘Questions and Answers’, contains five texts illustrating Christian–Muslim theological exchanges in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The sixth and final chapter, ‘Old Strategies for a New Era’, is comprised of three fifteenth-century texts that give a taste of Muslim and Christian attitudes towards the other at ‘the Dawn of Modernity’.

The particular texts chosen

represent many of the most essential texts for those who wish to understand the history of Christian–Muslim theological engagement and the fullest range of theological issues that arise from this history. Further, the theological topics that emerge from these texts continue to appear in present-day works about Christian–Muslim dialogue. (8)

The book was conceived ‘with students and professors in mind’ (xii). While there are other important sources that need to be studied in order to gain a fuller picture of the history of Christian–Muslim relations during the seventh through fifteenth centuries, these texts are intended to meet Tieszen’s objective of providing ‘readers with a helpful introduction to the ways in which Christians and Muslims reflected theologically about each other’, letting ‘as many voices speak as possible so that we can begin to understand the history of Christian–Muslim relations with greater clarity’ (6).

In classes I have taught on the history of Christian–Muslim relations, in which I like to use excerpts of such texts, one of the problems students have faced is the mixed readability of the translations from which they are drawn, which has been further complicated by the modes of reasoning and argumentation of Christian and Muslim writers who lived centuries ago. Students easily become frustrated and annoyed. Many readers will run up against these same challenges as they work through the texts in this collection. Tieszen, however, provides brief but helpful introductions to the authors and excerpted texts, which assist the reader to see them in context and identify some of the key theological issues in the texts.

In addition, the concluding chapter of the book, ‘Mapping Some of the Literary Topoi of Christian–Muslim Relations’, highlights and briefly analyses theological themes found in the texts. These include: Muslim comments on unity and trinity; Muslim concern over the person and work of Christ; Muslim comments on the Church; the corruption of Christian scripture; Muhammad as the Paraclete and a biblical figure; attacks on the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur’an, and Muslims; Christ versus Muhammad; discerning the true religion; and apocalypticism. While this list does not exhaust examples of literary topoi to be found in texts of the type gathered in this book, it does detail some of the most prominent. I believe many (especially the novice) will find it helpful to read this chapter before launching into the texts and then come back here again after reading them.

One may regret that other extracts have not been incorporated, including different excerpts from the larger texts from which this collection has been drawn. At least with respect to the latter, Tieszen has clearly identified the sources from which he has drawn. This will aid the interested reader to track down those sources and discover further riches. In spite of the challenges some readers may encounter in reading the texts in this volume, and while one might like to see other extracts in such a collection, this book is an excellent resource for those interested in studying the history of Christian–Muslim relations. It also provides in one convenient



volume an important collection of primary texts for those who like to use such material in courses on the history of Christian–Muslim relations.

References

- Goddard, Hugh. 2000. *A History of Christian–Muslim Relations*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gaudeul, Jean-Marie. 1984. *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*. 2 vols. Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e Islamici.

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