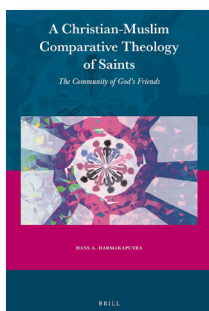## BOOK REVIEW

A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints: The Community of God's Friends. By Hans A. Harmakaputra. Brill, 2022. 258 pages. $68.00 (paperback). ISBN 9789004510524.

In *A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints*, a revised version of the author's doctoral thesis, Hans Harmakaputra "proposes an inclusive Christian theology of saints that could recognize the sanctity of non-Christian saintly figures" (29). To do so, Harmakaputra draws upon the work of modern Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians alongside the Andalusi scholar Ibn ʿArabī (1165–1240). He uses the constructs of sainthood developed by these intellectuals in order to formulate his own interreligious framework for understanding saints.

Besides an introduction and conclusion, Harmakaputra's book develops over two main sections, each with four chapters. The first section is an overview of saints and sainthood in Christianity and Islam. In Chapter 1, Harmakaputra looks at post-Vatican II theological discourse emanating from the Roman Catholic theologians Karl Rahner (1904–84), Elizabeth Johnson, and Jean-Luc Marion. Chapter 2 looks at Protestant theologizing, focusing on Reformers, contemporary Protestant views of sainthood, and analysis from Lutheran theologians Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45) and Paul Tillich (1886–1965). Harmakaputra's choices in these chapters are narrow from both global—most figures are from the West—and ecclesial perspectives— no Eastern Christian or broader Protestant figures are engaged. On the one hand, such delineations are necessary in order to keep the study from unraveling into something that might otherwise be too unwieldy. More importantly, the figures Harmakaputra does discuss help him to highlight key developments in Christian theology and form bases for which to build his inclusive theology of saints. Further, the author includes personal references throughout the book (a welcome inclusion in an academic monograph), such

as experiences in Central Java (63), that help to situate his reflection in wider, more global contexts.

On the other hand, however, the absence of Eastern Christian thought in Harmakaputra's book is more noticeable, especially since a key feature of his work engages Muslim intellectual developments concerning saints and sainthood. Harmakaputra acknowledges the historian Peter Brown and his work outlining the presence and function of Christian monks and saintly figures in Late Antique Syria (5, 174–77; Harmakaputra links Brown's work to the development of saint veneration in "Latin Christianity," instead of Eastern Christianity in Late Antiquity). Yet in Chapter 3, which focuses on sainthood in Islam, he does not explore the ways in which the Eastern Christian historical and regional context influenced Muslim conceptions of saints and sainthood.

Relatedly, Harmakaputra begins to highlight Johnson's "companionship paradigm" (32) in his first chapter, juxtaposing it against a more traditional conception of saints and devotees modeled on a patron-petitioner paradigm. This paradigm has its roots in the ascetic monasticism of Late Antique Syria and further informs Islamic notions of a *walī Allāh* ("friend of God"), a focus in Chapters 3 and 4. But Eastern Christian monasticism in Late Antiquity, beyond formulating holy men and women as patrons of a community's wellbeing, also informs a view of saints as companions where devotees were often said to walk like or along with a patron. Similarly, a saint could be construed as a pattern or icon upon which a devotee might pattern themselves; this former view is touched upon by Harmakaputra in Chapter 3 (83) and the latter companionship model becomes central to his inclusive theology in the book throughout. In this light, some engagement with Eastern Christian thought seems warranted, if not vital for an inclusive, Christian-Muslim theology of saints.[1]

The absence of engagement with Eastern Christian thought notwithstanding, the figures with which Harmakaputra does engage provide the necessary framework for a comparative theology of saints and prepares him to develop an inclusive theology that finds room for non-Christian saintly figures. This development begins in the second section of his book

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[1] For the Eastern Christian context of saints and its connections to Islamic thought, see, for example, Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Charles Tieszen, "Patriarch Timothy I and the Prophethood of Muhammad: A Re-Appraisal," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 35, no. 2 (2024): 169–81.

where, in Chapter 5, he brings the insights from the universality of the *walāya* ("friends") and Rahner's notion of God's self-communication to bear on the possibility of non-Christian saints. He notes that saints can be seen as "manifestations," or revealers, "of God's grace in history," and as such mediators of God's grace (133–34).

From revealers of God's grace, Harmakaputra moves in Chapter 6 to the notion of saints' "hiddenness," drawing on concepts from Marion and Ibn ʿArābi. Here, Harmakaputra points out that "saints are hidden because they act as icons of God" (147) since their lives point towards or reveal God instead of themselves. The implications of this "hiddenness" become clear in Chapter 7 where Harmakaputra emphasizes the nature of saints as companions, or a "circle of friends" encompassing both the living and the dead (186) over and against more traditional models of sainthood that position saintly figures as visible patrons who offer mediation between petitioners and God.

This leads Harmakaputra, in his final chapter, to outline the essentials for his inclusive Christian theology of saints. Accordingly, he argues that a saint, for Christians and non-Christians alike, can be better seen as a "sign-event because she signifies something beyond herself: God, the Most Holy" (217). With this in mind, Harmakaputra offers two case studies— the Dutch Jesuit Frans van der Lugt (1938–2014) who was killed in Syria and Abdurrahman Wahid (1940–2009), the Muslim spiritual and political leader from Indonesia (206–17). The cases of van der Lugt and Wahid help Harmakaputra to demonstrate what it looks like to "respond positively to God's self-communication" and how the universality of God's holiness can appear in the world (217).

The implications for Harmakaputra's work are important for Christian-Muslim relations, comparative theology, and a Christian understanding of what it means to follow God alongside companions from both within and outside traditional ecclesial boundaries. Students of comparative theology, scholars of Christian-Muslim relations, and practitioners of interreligious dialogue will benefit from Harmakaputra's book and see ways in which they might carry his insights forward as well.

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