

***A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*. 2nd ed. By Hugh Goddard. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. xii+228 pp. ISBN 978-1-474-46680-6. \$140.00, hardback; \$39.95, paperback.**

As a newly minted PhD student out of the University of Birmingham I was excited about the opportunities to teach in my field of Christian-Muslim relations. The first edition of *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, by Hugh Goddard, which had just come out in 2000, was an excellent tool for the craft. Unlike most other monographs or studies that tended to be technical or detailed scholarly works, where authors were working in a variety of primary source languages (including Arabic, Syriac, Greek, Latin, Persian, etc.), *A History* provided an accessible introduction for students. And then September 11th happened. As is often the case, the book immediately became outdated. The students to whom I assigned the book throughout the 2000s indicated that the resource was helpful, “but what about 9/11”? Their interests focused on Islamic extremism and how 9/11 impacted Christian-Muslim relations, which was of course completely absent from the first edition.

I am thankful that Hugh Goddard and Edinburgh University Press have decided to release a second edition of this book, adding a final chapter that focuses on the twenty-first century, and bringing the “Chronology” (ix–xi) and the bibliography (213–14) up to date. Naturally, any historical survey like this will inevitably go out of date once again, but at least this teaching tool now covers the major events of the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

A History is organized as an historical overview of the interactions between Muslims and Christians from the seventh century onward, highlighting important authors and trends in relations. Chapter 1 provides the necessary background reading on pre-Islamic Christianity in the Middle East and, more importantly, on early Christian thinking about other religions, particularly Judaism. This places the challenge of a post-Christian religion in the context of previous Christian thought. Chapter 2 discusses the history of Muhammad’s interaction with Christians and the references to Christians in the Qur’an. Chapters 3–5 then wind their way through the Islamic empires of the medieval periods, focusing on Christians as religious minorities, and the imperial struggles with Byzantium and then Latin Christendom. Chapter 6 notes a shift in the balance of cultural and political power as Europe advanced into Islamic territories through colonialism and Christian mission (which should be seen as symbiotic rather than synonymous). Chapters 7 and 8 review the modern dialogue movements and the academic study of religion by adherents of both faiths. Finally, chapter 9, the most important addition to this second edition, provides a catalogue of violent events in the world, beginning with 9/11, the various terrorist attacks in Europe, European cultural attacks on Islamic identity such as the Danish cartoon incidents and the Swiss referendum against the building of minarets, and President Trump’s “Muslim ban” of 2017.

Chapter 9 also reviews important Christian-Muslim collaboration that has taken place throughout this period, including President Khatami of Iran inaugurating the “Decade of Dialogue” in 2001 (prior to 9/11), John Paul II’s historic visits to Damascus, the publication of *A Common Word*, the Building Bridges Seminar, Jordanian and UAE support for Christian minorities, and other important interfaith movements. Still, one cannot but help leave the chapter deeply depressed by the litany of dates and numbers of fatalities and casualties resulting from religious

violence, even if such extremist violence may have been perpetrated by “angry young men” who were “not necessarily pious” but discovered Islam as a vehicle to justify their actions (181).

A History still serves as an important resource as a college textbook or even for a seminary graduate course. The most useful aspect of this book is that the chapters are very readable assignments of about twenty pages in length, with endnotes that allow more advanced students the opportunity for further reading. While the notes might be a bit dated, nevertheless, the works referenced are still valuable. The one critical resource that is missing in the second edition, however, is the indispensable seminal research of the *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographic History*. Published in two series, the first series covered the years 600–1500 and the second series the period from 1500–1900.

Two things stand out in Goddard’s book. First, readers will quickly encounter the author’s insistence on using both the the dominant Latin Christian calendar, and *hijri* dates, denoting the Islamic calendar. While the double dates (e.g., 622/1) can be cumbersome, it is an important reminder that there are two different frames of reference which need to be kept in mind. Second, and most importantly, there is a concerted effort to focus on the diversity of views about each faith tradition “which has usually existed in each community at any one time” (3). For example, Goddard provides a brief analysis of the views of two Protestant ministers and scholars from the early twentieth century, Hendrik Kraemer and Wilfred Cantwell Smith—both of whom taught in Muslim-majority contexts, but who had very different understandings of Islam and the relationship between Islam and Christianity. In addition, the South African polemicist Ahmed Deedat could not be further from the methodology of his fellow Muslim compatriot, Farid Esack, who drew much of his thinking from Christian liberation theology. The diversity of opinions of, and about, one another is a critical perspective that needs to be underlined, lest students fall into the tired old Clash of Civilizations theory, that the West and Islam are on polar opposites of the cultural spectrum, and that these two monoliths are doomed to an eternal battle (see especially 176–79).

It is this important underlying theme of Goddard’s work that does prompt one final comment. The effort to point out the diversity of perspectives throughout the centuries cuts against the often used designations of “the West” and “the world of Islam” which permeate the book. While it is undeniable that throughout the centuries an Islamic civilization has butted against a Latin Christendom, this bipolar view itself conveniently undervalues the importance of the history and contributions of Eastern Christianity and Western Islam. We might certainly suggest that in the last twenty years there has been a great deal more emphasis placed on the reality of such “minority” expressions of Islam and Christianity and a recognition of the multivalent identities of people of faith around the world.

To Goddard’s credit, in chapter 9 he does point out the importance of viewing some of the recent violence as part of an overall “culture-war” as opposed to a simple clash of religions (188). He rightly notes the rise of modernity and secularism, with which even European and North American Christians have had to struggle. Thus, it is not a foregone conclusion that a future clash between Christians and Muslims will play out not between “Western anthropocentric liberalism” and “theocentric revivalist Islam” (205), but perhaps rather between people of faith living within a culture of anthropocentric liberalism and those Muslims and Christians from Africa or Asia, for example, who share a theocentric revivalism and distrust secularism in its many diverse forms. Muslim communities not only living in “the West” but those Muslims growing up within Western

liberalist traditions, along with its various social and cultural norms, do share more in common with their Christian fellow citizens than they do with their ancestors or their immigrant homelands. Likewise, Christian leaders in the global east and south often have a very different understanding of Christianity than western Christians.

A History of Christian-Muslim Relations still remains the best accessible overview of the history of Muslim and Christian engagement to date. Whether this is used with undergraduates or graduate students, it provides a solid basis from which students can begin their introduction to, and study of, an important field. We are indebted to Goddard for providing the field this valuable foundation once again.

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