

***People of the Book: An Interfaith Dialogue about How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Understand Their Sacred Scriptures.* By Dan Cohn-Sherbok, George D. Chryssides, and Usama Hasan. Foreword by Marcus Braybrooke. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019. 288 pp. ISBN 978-1-78592-104-9. \$24.95 paperback; \$24.95, eBook.**

The idea of a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim writing a book together is not new. I have several examples in my personal library. Nor is it novel to publish a series of conversations between a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim. One of the books on my shelf is, essentially, a record of exchanges between three respected US scholars. A slender volume, it conveys substantial information, but—from my perspective—its main value lies in its provision of an opportunity to overhear and evaluate an actual dialogue (defined as a multi-step conversation with transformative potential). However, more than a quarter-century has elapsed since its release. It may be a classic; but it is no longer easily available.

People of the Book: An Interfaith Dialogue about How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Understand Their Sacred Scriptures is, therefore, a welcome addition to the genre. Its three authors are based in the UK. Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok, professor emeritus of Judaism at the University of Wales, is the author or editor of some ninety works—many of them addressing interreligious concerns. George Chryssides, who (after sojourns in the Church of Scotland, and the United Reformed Church) is now active in the Church of England, is a religion scholar who does research at York St John University and University of Birmingham. Cohn-Sherbok and Chryssides came to this project having collaboratively authored three volumes previously, but with Muslim scholar Dawoud El-Alami. This is their first collaboration with Usama Hasan, whose advanced degrees are in theoretical physics, mathematics, engineering, and artificial intelligence, but who now concentrates on Islamic studies at Quilliam International (an organization whose mission is the countering of extremism) and on translating classical Islamic works. The text maintains the informality typical of a conversation among friends. So, while this book is nearly 300 pages in length, it is rather easy reading on the whole.

Each of the five parts of *People of the Book* is tightly and consistently structured. Part One has chapters on the transmission, authority, use, and methods of interpretation of Scripture—in short, chapters answering questions about the Tanakh, the Bible, and the Qur’an *per se*. Parts Two through Five survey questions—both theological and practical—that scriptures address: God; Guidance for Life; Social and Political Issues; Hope. On every topic, each man gets equal time (thus much stay under a word-count limit); but the order in which they speak varies. As for tone, the authors purport to be aiming for “friendly frankness”—which is interesting. Their interactions certainly are not rancorous. However, to my students, they definitely seem more frank than friendly.

My students are reading *People of the Book: An Interfaith Dialogue about How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Understand Their Sacred Scriptures* during a course on interreligious dialogical models and methods. Students are assigned specific chapters that they are to study dialogically with a partner. From my vantage point, modelling and inspiring dialogue is the best use of *People of the Book*. It is not comprehensive enough nor nuanced enough to function as the primary textbook for an “Introduction to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam” course. It would need to be supplemented or

clarified at every turn. But when the class's primary task is to analyze and assess the interaction between three colleagues as "dialogue", this book provides a fine case for close study.

In short, *People of the Book: An Interfaith Dialogue about How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Understand Their Sacred Scriptures* is not meant to be the last word on any topic it includes. It does, however, provide three perspectives on each, leaving the reader with plenty to think about.

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