

***A World of Inequalities: Christian and Muslim Perspectives.* Edited by Lucinda Mosher. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2021. 253 pp. ISBN 9781626168091. \$34.95 paperback; \$104.95 hardcover.**

In the field of Interreligious Studies, the Building Bridges Seminar, by invitation only, are enjoyed by chosen participants and respected by the wider theological community, with perhaps a dollop of holy envy by some cohorts looking in from the outside. With roots going back to the first seminar in London in 2002 (subsequently published as a book), the yearly seminars and corresponding publications bring together scholars in Christianity and Islam on a focused theme each year. For the Seventeenth Seminar, which met in Sarajevo in 2018, the theme was inequality.

Built upon a successful formula of close readings of holy scriptures, small group sessions, and daily keynote addresses, the Seminars aim to establish a rapport among interreligious participants in settings that encourage mutual learning and hospitality. These published proceedings aim to provide an intersectional platform examining various societal inequalities through the lenses of Islam and Christianity, with all the complications such a contested theme entails. Essays from fourteen scholars examine issues from gender, race, and class perspectives in Christianity and Islam to the role of historical and modern slavery, and how those faiths' holy books and traditions have interpreted, challenged, and adjudicated such difficult moral and social justice terrain.

After an overview by editor Lucinda Mosher, the book is divided into six parts, with standout contributions from participants in the first two parts of the book. Part One's overview is comprised of Ovamir Anjun's refreshingly nuanced and self-critical examination of "Unjust Inequality as a Challenge for Contemporary Islam," especially as he positions himself in the "traditionalist" camp (16). David Hollenbach, whose essays are always lucid and elegantly argued, focuses on how inequality in our world challenges Christians today. Part Two encourages the Muslim and Christian participants to "face" the reality of inequality in our world today, and Samia Huq provides a rich and layered account of Gender and Islam that had me adding her essay to my module on Religion and Gender. As Huq writes in the conclusion: "...gender and Islam are entangled in a variety of ways, and each of those entanglements lock Muslims into their tradition differently" (48). Ultimately, she hopes for a "re-envisioning of the welfare of Muslims and their communities" (49).

Part Two also includes Elizabeth Phillips' acute analysis of the problems of race in Christianity, a particularly pressing and ongoing area for development, reconciliation, and restitution. The inclusion of François Pazisnewende Kaboré's analysis of inequality in West Africa, combining economic and theological insights, is also a noteworthy addition. The section closes with a tour de force essay on slavery in Islam and Christianity from an interfaith perspective by Jonathan Brown.

While the remaining essays are solid, none particularly stand out. Abdullah Saeed's reflection on race and gender in the Qur'an seemed overly cautious, especially when examining the often divisive Q.4:34 passage, though his reflection on economic inequality in the Qur'an was helpful and informative (for some reason, he is not listed as one of the Seminar participants in the book (vii). As an aside, I was struck by Azza Karam's comment that "as we delved into the texts,

we tempered our zeal to find answers and to understand them. We reminded one another not to impose our twenty-first century morality into hugely different contexts, to avoid the fallacy of applying a contemporary set of standards to analyse and evaluate texts that have emerged in another age and culture” (209). I hope there was some healthy counterclaims here, especially as such texts are deemed eternal, living, and true by billions of Christians and Muslims. While still requiring humility, failure to apply our developing understanding of the human condition, justice, science, and morality to these sacred texts is to risk an ossified understanding of religious identity, belonging, and striving.

Overall, there are some excellent contributions here, though the collection, especially in the later parts, could have benefitted from a few more fringe, “edgy” (to borrow C. Rosalee Velloso Ewll’s term of “the edge”), or self-critical voices. Great harm has been perpetrated by, or at least in the name of, both Christianity and Islam through moral failure in condoning or perpetuating inequality or in seeing theological and cultural difference as a form of inequality that has to be replaced or superseded. A pervasive patriarchal and top-down hierarchy is either rooted in, or co-ops, both of these religion’s core starting points, especially when spreading their respective faiths to the ends of the earth. To say such spreading has had severe implications not only on women, but local indigenous cultures, especially Jews (by Christians leading up to the Shoah and now by Islamic countries in the Middle East) is a vast understatement. On account of such failures, deep humility, if not theological rage and shame, could have been more robust here. At a Seminar located in a city and region where interreligious and interethnic mass atrocities and ethnic cleansing were committed in recent years, including genocide in Srebrenica against Bosniaks (Bosnians who are Muslim) by predominantly Orthodox Christian Serbians, the general silence is surprisingly muted. Such is another inequality in our world—how some mass atrocities remain peripheral and vastly unaddressed.

Peter Admirand  
Dublin City University



The views, opinions, and positions expressed in all articles published by the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* (JIRS) are the authors’ own and do not reflect or represent those of the JIRS staff, the JIRS Board of Advisors, or JIRS publishing partners.