

Faithful Interpretations: Truth and Islam in Catholic Theology of Religions.
Edited by Philip Geister, SJ, and Gösta Hallonsten. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press. 2021. viii + 214 pp. ISBN: 9780813234045. \$75.00, hardcover.

Faithful Interpretations, the title of this volume, is a translation of *pia interpretatio*, a phrase used to describe Nicholas of Cusa's relatively sympathetic approach to the Qur'an. It is an apt title, because constructing an adequate Christian theology of religions requires a double faithfulness: both to the home tradition and to the religious other. The book is the fruit of a 2017 conference, "Theology of Religions: Roman Catholic Perspectives," held at the Newman Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. Its essays can be divided roughly into two types: those that wrestle with the idea of the Christian theology of religions in general (Di Noia, Moyaert, Kärkkäinen, Bernhardt, Jonkers, Wiertz) and those that do constructive work on a particular topic in the theology of religions and/or comparative theology (D'Costa, Cucarella, von Stosch, Moreland, Valkenberg). The volume approaches theology of religions from a Western perspective, by considering questions related to secularism, philosophy, ecumenism, and Christian-Jewish and Christian-Muslim relations. No essays treat the theology of religions as it pertains to Eastern religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism.

Of the essays that discuss the theology of religions in general, Di Noia offers a concise summary of post-Vatican II Catholic magisterial teaching on the subject, highlighting key issues such as the tension between dialogue and proclamation, and the idea of Jesus Christ as unique savior. Moyaert's introduction sets the stage for the rest of the book by overviewing the classic threefold typology, distinguishing between theology of religions and comparative theology, and offering insights on how theologians can avoid hegemony and embrace vulnerability. Essays by Bernhardt, Wiertz, and Jonkers are philosophically oriented, focusing on the role of truth in the theology of religions. The Kärkkäinen piece is unique for its ecumenical focus. He relates the *intra*-religious to the *inter*-religious by offering a Protestant "sympathetic-critical" appraisal of the Roman Catholic theology of religions. He also describes concrete instances of ecumenical collaboration in studying this topic; for example, he recommends *Nostra Aetate* 3 to his Protestant seminarians, calling it the "most hospitable account of Islam."

The remaining essays do substantive constructive work in theology of religions and/or comparative theology, focusing mainly on Christian-Muslim topics. D'Costa is the one exception, concentrating instead on the Christian-Jewish relationship by analyzing *Nostra Aetate* 4's "irrevocable covenant" language as it pertains to the land. But he correctly notes that this bilateral conversation has implications for others, e.g., Christian-Muslim dialogue.

With the articles by Cucarella, Moreland, von Stosch, and Valkenberg, the book shifts from *describing* theology, to *engaging* in it. Cucarella argues for the "disruptive" nature of Islam in Christian accounts of salvation history, by examining the writings of medieval Arabophone theologians on this topic—showing just how long Christians have been doing theology of religions. Moreland reconsiders the possibility of Muhammad's prophethood using Christian criteria from Aquinas and Vatican II; in so doing, she "recognizes resemblances among religious traditions amid the backdrop of radical difference." Von Stosch treats Jesus's death on the cross comparatively, beginning with Qur'anic arguments for and against. But then he makes a surprising move, by suggesting that the crucifixion is not the locus of the most fruitful

conversation here. Instead, he proposes, “if we ask for a passion of God’s word, we will have to look how the Qur’an as God’s Word is welcomed by the people.” And where does this new line of questioning lead? He concludes: “the Qur’an is rejected by the people and the vocabulary that is used to describe this rejection is quite similar to the vocabulary used in the Gospel to describe the rejection of Christ.” For von Stosch, the true focus of comparative theology here is not the crucifixion (and its biblical affirmation or qur’anic denial), but rather, the world’s rejection of the Word of God, be it Christ or the Qur’an. Finally, Valkenberg’s essay, the last in the book, applies the idea of “faithful interpretation” not only to Christian interpretations of the Qur’an, but also to Christian interpretations of Islam itself (a.k.a., a theology of Islam). He says that Catholics can begin to “regard Islam with esteem” only when they approach Islam theologically, which until recently has been rare in the Christian West.

The volume is unified by a few key themes that cut across several articles. For example, many authors express concern about arrogance in the theology of religions, and single out humility as a necessary corrective: Di Noia wonders if claiming Christ as the unique savior is arrogant; Moyaert suggests that comparative theology might be a more humble approach to other traditions than theology of religions; Bernhardt proposes “accepting that God’s truth is ‘greater’ than every religious perception of it” can lead to theological humility and curiosity. And Wiertz asks, “Does an exclusivist understanding of the notion and role of religious truth lead to intellectual arrogance? Does it undermine our ability to remain humble and open-minded?”

Another idea that appears in various articles is how the interplay between bilateral relationships (Christian-Jewish, Christian-Muslim) affects the Christian theology of religions. For example, while Cucarella’s main focus is on Islam’s role in salvation history, he says that any good Christian theology of Islam must consider “whether and to what extent Islam belongs together with Judaism and Christianity.” In a similar vein, Valkenberg suggests that “the study of Islam may help solve neuralgic issues in Jewish-Christian relations.” He goes on to contrast *Nostra Aetate*’s description of Christian-Jewish dialogue as mainly theological with its description of Christian-Muslim dialogue as mainly ethical, and rightly observes that theological dialogue between Christians and Muslims remains underdeveloped to this day. The essays in this volume that treat theological topics such as prophecy, soteriology, and divine suffering go a long way towards correcting this.

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