Book Reviews and Notices


The Muslim-Christian Research Group brings together some thirty-five Christian and Muslim friends trained in scientific research and having a serious knowledge of their own religious tradition. They work to promote new directions in interreligious dialogue without any official mandate but in solidarity with their own faith communities. From 1976 until the present they have taken various topics as subjects of reflection, among them secularization, faith and justice, and the Muslim and Christian scriptures. The present volume is made up of three chapters containing the text of their research and discussions on the last of these subjects. The first chapter seeks an approach common to Christians and Muslims for analyzing the phenomenon of scripture, the second describes its reception by believers individually and in community, the third aims to have each partner in dialogue take account of the other’s scripture in his vision of faith. The presupposition in all this is that religious traditions in these times can do better than claim an exclusive possession of the truth. Rather they should seek fresh ways of presenting their spiritual heritage to people of today.

The book offers many excellent insights into principles ideally to be applied in interreligious dialogue, e.g., (1) believers finding the fulness of their yearning in their own scripture should not therefore conclude that their own is the exhaustive expression of God’s Word; (2) what is said to us about God and the unsurpassable Jesus Christ event is said in human language, uttered in time and place, and by definition inadequate to express the totality of the eternal Word of God and the singular mystery of His person as incarnate Word; (3) every reading of scripture is largely conditioned by the reader’s personal situation and by its living context (space, time). God calls all believers to reread their own scripture in order to draw from its richness answers to the
questions of today’s men and women.

A point that some readers might wish to see further developed concerns one of the criteria of authenticity for non-Christian revelation, i.e., the criterion of the content of the message, which content would enable one to discern whether something claiming to be a revelation from God is really such. Even admitting that reading the Qur’an may reveal a deep experience of God to the Christian, how can the reader be sure that the experience originates from the Qur’an itself and not from some passage it reproduces in altered form from the Bible or from other Jewish or Christian sources? It is true that no text can be explained by its sources but only by the use it makes of them (p. 66), but here the sources themselves are not considered as explaining or interpreting the Qur’an but as perhaps explaining the religious experience of the reader. Moreover, after saying (p. 64) that “the Qur’an bears such unmistakable hallmarks” [of authenticity] it would help to sum up a few examples before going on to say, “We could add many other indices, like the refusal to ‘prove’ anything . . . when it can only affirm and proclaim what it has ‘seen’.” Since there is question here of criteria, is refusal to provide something more than a subjective experience (not of course to insincere critics but to seekers in good faith) a justifiable attitude?

The book is almost completely free of typographical errors, but a few have crept in. Ibn Ḥazm’s death date should be 456/1064 instead of that given at the top of p. 79. Trismegistus is misspelled on p. 51 and in the index (p. 103). On p. 98, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) is said to be the grandfather of Averroes.

Islamochristiana, 1 (1975), a review often cited in this book, in its Liminaire (p. vi) speaks of two kinds of interreligious dialogue, one polite and compliant, the other systematic, vigorous, and demanding. It then goes on to say that the elite among Christians and Muslims must choose the second, even if it is harder and requires a long and methodical preparation, because in the last analysis, dialogue looks for truth, seeks after God, and brings about growth in mutual respect. This book is a good example of the second and should be read by anyone concerned with serious interfaith encounter.

Thomas J. O’Shaughnessy, S.J.


The author presents his book, not as a narrative history, but as an introduction to the basic concepts and problems of Islam. After a brief note on the