

Book Review - "Jesus and the Resurrection: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts"

In the following book review - a for-the-blog exclusive piece - John Lapp explores a concept central to the topic [Theology of Religions](#): interfaith dialogue. It makes for an interesting read alongside an online article by Jim Pankratz, "[Jesus Plus:Plus Jesus](#)", which was released today and also considers the significance of Jesus in other faith contexts. Take a look!

Jesus and the Resurrection: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts, edited by David Emmanuel Singh, Regnum Books International, 2014. 205 pp. ISBN: 978149821723.

This volume is a long-awaited conclusion to a trilogy published by Regnum, the first two of which were on the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. Correspondingly to the first two volumes, here writers with experience in the Islamic world think creatively about how Resurrection could become an appealing opening for theological discussions with Muslims. I have not read the first two books of the series, but various references in this one make it sound like they were very helpful. The present volume includes thirteen essays, with most dealing explicitly with Resurrection, both that of Jesus Christ as Christians and Muslims differently understand it, and also with the universal resurrection of the dead, again as both Christians and Muslims put their own spin on the matter.

I needn't go into the intricacies of "Resurrection" for Christians. For most Sunni Muslims it is ostensibly relatively simple: Jesus/Issa was not crucified at Golgotha but ascended to be with God, where he remains as a living human. Issa will return to earth in the end times, where he will rule justly as a great leader and do many great deeds, including conquering the "anti-Christ" and leading a decayed and lawless world to Islam. (The Mahdi, another messianic figure in Islam, is usually expected to work with Jesus in this final war of faithfulness. In Shiite Islam, there are expected to be a series of mahdis, which some understand as signifying different phases of history). Jesus and the Mahdi will then lead Allah's armies to a final showdown and destruction of "Gog and Magog" at Armageddon, at which point there will be a general resurrection of the dead and the Final Judgment. There is little eschatological clarity in Islam, but it appears that most authorities expect Jesus to die (but in an "honorable" way in battle) as all humans must. Then he joins all (now deceased) humanity in a general resurrection to life, at which point all will be judged and sent to our final destination – the good to a literal and sensual garden and the wicked to "be blind, dumb, deaf, and to hell and burning."

Thus, because all humans can expect to experience resurrection, most of the writers recommend that the subject is an excellent entrée into theological discussion with Muslims. No less than half of these essays engage in significant, but rather tedious, surveys of the few Qur'anic and extensive hadith discussions of these end-time matters. The hadith writers (the second-hand reports of the teachings, deeds and sayings of the prophet Muhammad) have far

more to say on Resurrection than does the Qur'an itself, but they are often contradictory, and later Islamic scholars are then called in to referee. There are also major differences between Shia and Sunni understandings of the end times, which again makes generalizations difficult.

While I initially appreciated the exegetics of Qur'an and Hadith, ultimately the papers became quite repetitive about the mechanics of resurrection in Christian and Islamic thought. Thus, the allure of the volume has more to do with the writers' insights on strategies for engaging in discussion with Muslim (seekers). Several writers allude to the potential for Resurrection-discussion to helpfully reinforce the honor and dignity of God, and even allow us to share how the Cross assures us of God's love and dignity, in contrast to the average Muslim's view of that event as irredeemably shameful.

Another ends his essay with this -- "The two messages differ here theologically...While Muslims will continue to disagree that Jesus rose from the dead and that such an event had salvific results, both Christians and Muslims can agree that God 'raised Jesus' for the good of humanity. We share a God that has positive intentions for humanity. That is something that can be shared in the face of modern religious skepticism or growing apocalyptic fervor." ("He Ascended into Heaven: Samuel Zwemer's Critique of the Ascension and Return of Jesus on the Day of Judgment in Islam", by David D. Grafton, in Singh, *Jesus and the Resurrection*.)

The collection is engaging and rewarding for those actively involved in theological discussion with Muslim friends and interlocutors, with some new witnessing insights from a Christian point of view. But, ultimately, resurrecting Resurrection debates became a crux in my throat.

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