

Book Reviews

Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara. *Al-Raḥāba al-Ilāhiyya: Lāhūt al-Ākhar fī-l-Masīḥiyya wa-l-Islām* [Divine Hospitality: Theology of the Other in Christianity and Islam]. Translated by Adel Theodor Khoury. Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-Būlusiyya, 2011. 247 pages.

In their attempt to find a place for the Other within both Christianity and Islam, Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara share together the writing of this book — originally published in 2011 in French as *L'hospitalité divine: L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chrétienne et musulmane*. Daou writes, from a Christian perspective, chapters one, three, and five, while Tabbara, from a Muslim perspective, writes chapters two, four, and six. There is a kind of correspondence between the two different contributions, which appears in the titles and the division of the chapters, as well as the two different conclusions of the book written by the two authors.

In the first chapter of the book Daou perceives Christ as a universal Savior and God dwelling in the heart of the human subject. He writes: “we can say that the culmination of divine hospitality actualizes in that God comes and makes His dwelling in the heart of the person who loves Him” (pp. 32-33). Hence, the spiritual experience is universal; it belongs to all, whether Christians or non-Christians. In chapter three the author aspires to reveal the universality of Christ’s salvation through the notion of the one holy history, which unfolds itself through the different covenants with Adam, Noah, and Abraham, and of which Islam is part. Here Daou refers to the approaches of Michel Hayek and Youakim Moubarac, opting for Moubarac’s view, which conceives Islam as belonging to the Abrahamic family, employing the image of a tree of salvation of which Islam is a branch (pp. 95-98). At a later stage the notion of “universality” brings Daou to admit the revelational nature of the Qur’ān and the prophetic mission of Muḥammad (pp. 99, 104-107). He nevertheless affirms the necessity of the final salvific role of Jesus Christ, discerning the tradition of the Other as within the scope of Christianity, and Christ as present in the religion of the Other.

Daou concludes in the fifth chapter that the all-inclusive mediating and redeeming role of Christ might be revealed through three channels: the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the particular means for sanctification of each religious tradition (p. 181). Here he refers to the

limitations of the different religious traditions and their inability to claim the ownership of Truth as such. Throughout the three chapters, and in his attempt for a genuine regard of the Other, Daou turns for support to the Bible, the Church Councils, and also to different theological positions as he develops his own arguments. A major contribution on Daou's part is his emphasis on the inevitability of dialogue between the different religious traditions and the demand for freedom of conscience and spiritual solidarity as major characteristics of one's spiritual identity.

Tabbara, in her turn, begins chapter two with the Islamic notion of the "economy of recalling" [*L'économie du rappel*], according to which Muslims are to recall the archetypal pacts [*les pactes archétypaux*] between humanity and God, based on which all human beings are given an inner inclination to seek God (pp. 44-45, 50-51). In this universal longing Tabbara finds the broad meaning of Islam, namely, to have faith in God and to experience a continuous return to the path of God — regardless of the particular religious belonging — which she calls "the Abrahamic path" (pp. 57, 61). Tabbara moves on, in chapter four, to describe the two early Islamic periods, which are the Meccan Period (609-622) and the Medinan Period ending with the death of the Prophet (622-632). She perceives the Meccan Period as the period of real peace and faith, despite persecution, during which a pure Abrahamic Islam took rise almost without laws and regulations, while the People of the Book were considered to belong to the same economy of recalling. On the other hand, it was during the Medinan Period that the unique Islamic identity, with its laws and regulations, was formed (pp. 130-132). It was in this second period that the desire for unity with the People of the Book failed, and hence, Islam, in its exclusive sense, appeared (pp. 137-138).

Along with her descriptive approach, Tabbara casts light on some terminological obscurities in Islam, like the term *kufṛ* — the denial or rejection of truth. Tabbara explains that *kufṛ*, whenever it is applied to the People of the Book in the Qur'ān, denotes their rejection of an element of Islamic faith while it never calls them *kuffār*, whereas some Muslim interpreters, erroneously, applied both *kuffār* and *mushrikūn* [pagans] to them (pp. 142-43). Tabbara also refers to the question of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. She explains that the early interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse — "Behold! Allah said: 'O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee [of the falsehoods] of those who blaspheme'" (*Āl 'Imrān* 3:55) — did not insist on denying the Death and the Resurrection. She also explains that the claim that not Jesus but a substitute died on the cross did not occur in the Qur'ān; rather it is part of the later *tafsīr* or interpretation of the verse, which most probably was the result of Christian-Muslim conflicts (pp. 152-154).

Furthermore, Tabbara proposes to consider a third Qur'ānic period, or era — toward the end of the Prophet's mission — based on *Surat al-Mā'ida*, according to which pluralism in religion is perceived; and here Tabbara refers to the disagreement concerning the question of salvation of the non-Muslims. Contrary to many interpretations, she maintains that in this period forgiveness and salvation is available for all, including those who belong to different religions, who believe and do good works, and this might include even the *mushrikūn* or the polytheists of Mecca (pp. 155-157). Here the main image used is the image of "The Table" which implies divine hospitality. "God cannot be owned by anyone and He is at an equal distance from all," writes Tabbara (p. 161). She maintains the openness of God to all humanity, while Muḥammad, as the Seal of the Prophets, is the one who believed in the prophets (p. 174).

In the last chapter of the book Tabbara concludes her part with the claim that "the Other, every other person, is a mirror of God. Hence, he/she is the way through which we reach at a knowledge of God" (p. 217); and that the Hereafter starts here on earth through the loving communion of believers belonging to different religions. Throughout the different parts Tabbara's writing is comprehensive, oriented to all readers, including non-Muslims. Her thoughts are clear and open to followers of other religious traditions, and at the same time it is daring and critical of one-sided or exclusive interpretations of Islamic thought.

Another advantage of the book, generally speaking, is the method by which both authors present their contributions in correspondence with each other. This is helpful and praiseworthy as it brings forth the two-sided attempt to meet the Other. Nevertheless, in the process of reading the book it is difficult to track the correspondence, since the writings of Daou or Tabbara do not address or refer to the other's contribution, so that the correspondence remains rather on the surface level of the work, without penetrating the depth of the issues under consideration.

Besides the advantages, few critical remarks might be appropriate here. Daou's claim that there is "one holy history" (pp. 73, 78), which unfolds itself through the different covenants and that the Church "perceives itself as repository for the fulfillment of divine inspiration" (p. 196) somehow hinders his own innovative effort. Daou's perception of history as predominantly Christian somehow overrides his attempt to encounter the Other fully. He claims that the covenant through Christ is not meant to replace all other types of covenants of the Old Testament (p. 86); nevertheless, the whole approach of aspiring to justify the place of Islam as belonging to the one "history of salvation" is questionable. It hinders the possibility of meeting the Other as an Other, namely, as one who does not necessarily share one's own religious beliefs and traditions. It is also based on the notion

of “history of salvation” (pp. 104, 107), which itself is subject to the modern critique of religion. Furthermore, such an approach induces the person to appropriate the religion of the Other and also to adapt one’s own heritage in order to correspond to the expectations of the other religion (see pp. 99, 104).

Another disadvantage of the covenant theology maintained by Daou is its incapability to address the religions in which the notion of covenant is absent. What about the followers of religions other than Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? To conclude, one might say that a kind of discrepancy and an inconsistency between a genuine regard of the Other and the dominance of one’s own tradition is unavoidable in such an approach. Any attempt to search for the Other within one’s own conventional knowledge and claims of faith is a contradiction and an inconsistency in itself. This inconsistency is more evident whenever Christians claim that Islam, which is a later religion, belongs to the Christian tradition.

Nevertheless, Daou’s and Tabbara’s work remain an innovative and courageous attempt to meet and accept the Other. Both do correspond and meet at several points as both maintain the universality of religious experience and make daring claims concerning the followers of religions other than their own. This makes the combination of their works in this book a notable move toward the Other.

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