

The Journal of Social Encounters

Volume 7
Issue 2 *Exploring the Various Dimensions and
Manifestations of Solidarity*

Article 34

2023

Review of A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints: The Community of God's Friends

Ian Kipngeno
Catholic University of Eastern Africa

Habiba Abdi Dika
Catholic University of Eastern Africa

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Islamic Studies Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kipngeno, Ian and Abdi Dika, Habiba (2023) "Review of A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints: The Community of God's Friends," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, 286-288.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol7/iss2/34

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Social Encounters by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

A Christian and a Muslim Perspective: A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints: The Community of God's Friends. Hans A. Harmakaputra. Brill, 2022, paper, 268 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-51052-4

Ian Kipngeno and Habiba Abdi Dika*

Ian Kipngeno: A Christian Perspective

The comparative theology of saints is a fascinating topic that examines the similarities and differences between the veneration of saints in Christianity and Islam. Both religions have a rich tradition of honoring saints and seeking their intercession, although the way in which this is done varies considerably. In Christianity, saints are typically understood as holy men and women who have lived exemplary lives and are now believed to be in heaven, where they intercede on behalf of believers. Devotion to saints takes many forms, including prayers, pilgrimages to their shrines, and the veneration of relics associated with them.

In *A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints*, the writer offers a comprehensive study of the lives of saints in Christianity and Islam. The writer draws on a range of primary sources, including hagiographic accounts and works of Islamic and Christian theology, to explore the ways in which saints are venerated and understood in both religious traditions. This book is a valuable resource for scholars and students of comparative theology, as well as anyone interested in the intersections of Christianity and Islam.

The first chapter of the book provides an overview of the concept of sainthood in Christianity and Islam, tracing the historical development of saintly veneration in both traditions. The writer notes that while the idea of sainthood is not identical in the two religions, there are significant points of overlap and shared understanding. For example, both Christians and Muslims believe that saints can intercede on behalf of the living, and both have developed practices of pilgrimage to saintly shrines.

Subsequent chapters focus on particular saints and their stories, highlighting the similarities and differences in how they are understood and venerated in Christianity and Islam. For example, Harmakaputra examines the lives of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, and explores the ways in which their roles as models of piety and devotion have been interpreted in each tradition. Similarly, he looks at the lives of figures such as Francis of Assisi and Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, considering how their teachings and legacies have been understood by Christian and Muslim communities.

One of the strengths of Harmakaputra's approach is his attention to the diversity of views and practices within each tradition. He notes that there are multiple ways of understanding sainthood even within Christianity and Islam, and that these interpretations are shaped by a range of factors, including historical context, cultural norms, and theological frameworks. By acknowledging this complexity, Harmakaputra avoids the temptation to offer a simplistic comparison of the two traditions and instead provides a nuanced and thoughtful analysis.

Overall, *A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints* is a valuable contribution to the study of comparative religion, offering a rich and detailed exploration of the ways in which Christianity and Islam have approached the concept of sainthood. While the book is primarily

*Review of A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints:
The Community of God's Friends*

aimed at scholars and students of theology, its accessible writing style and clear organization make it a useful resource for anyone interested in the intersections of these two religious traditions.

One potential limitation of the book is its narrow focus on the lives of individual saints. While the author does touch on broader theological questions, such as the nature of intercession and the role of women in religious leadership, these issues are not given the same depth of analysis as the individual stories of the saints. Some readers may also wish for more explicit engagement with contemporary debates and controversies surrounding the veneration of saints in both Christianity and Islam.

There are many similarities between the two traditions. Both Christianity and Islam emphasize the importance of moral and spiritual exemplars, and both recognize the potential for individuals to live lives of extraordinary holiness. Moreover, both traditions recognize the importance of prayer and the role that saints can play in facilitating communication between humans and the divine.

In conclusion, *A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints* is a valuable contribution to the study of comparative theology and an important resource for anyone interested in the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Harmakaputra's careful attention to the nuances of both traditions and his willingness to engage with complexity and diversity make this book a valuable addition to any library or syllabus on interfaith studies.

Habiba Abdi Dika: A Muslim Perspective

A Christian Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints by Hans Harmakaputra is a book that explores the similarities and differences in the veneration of saints in Christianity and Islam. The author examines the theological and historical contexts in which the veneration of saints emerged in both religions, as well as the ways in which the practices and beliefs surrounding saints have evolved over time.

The book provides an overview of the major saints in both Christianity and Islam, including their origins, stories, and significance within their respective traditions. It also delves into the different theological perspectives on saints in both religions, including the debates over whether saints can intercede on behalf of believers and the role of saints in the religious life of believers.

The book offers a thoughtful and nuanced exploration of the similarities and differences between the veneration of saints in Christianity and Islam. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in comparative theology, interfaith dialogue, or the history and practices of these two major world religions.

Comparative theology is the study of different religious traditions in order to gain a deeper understanding of their similarities and differences. In the case of Christian and Muslim traditions, both have a rich tradition of saints who are venerated for their holiness, and who serve as models of piety and devotion for their respective communities.

Christianity has a long tradition of venerating saints, dating back to the early church. Saints are regarded as holy men and women who have lived exemplary lives of piety and devotion, and who

have been deemed by the church to have achieved a special place in heaven. They are believed to be able to intercede on behalf of the living, and to be powerful advocates for the faithful.

In the Islamic tradition, saints are known as *awliya* or friends of God, and they are revered for their piety, devotion, and spiritual insight. They are believed to have attained a special relationship with God through their devotion and good deeds, and are considered to be sources of spiritual guidance and inspiration. Muslims seek their intercession and blessings, and believe that they can help them in their spiritual journey.

Despite the differences in the way that Christian and Muslim traditions understand the concept of sainthood, there are many similarities between the two. Both traditions view saints as models of piety and devotion, and both believe that they have a special relationship with God that allows them to intercede on behalf of the living. In addition, both traditions celebrate the lives and legacies of their saints through various forms of veneration, such as the celebration of feast days, the construction of shrines, and the writing of hagiographies.

However, there also are some significant differences between the way that Christians and Muslims understand the concept of sainthood. For Christians, sainthood is conferred through the church, and is based on a set of strict criteria, such as the performance of miracles, the practice of heroic virtue, and the willingness to suffer and die for one's faith. In contrast, in the Islamic tradition, sainthood is based on personal piety, devotion, and spiritual insight, and is not conferred by any external authority.

Furthermore, while both traditions view their saints as intercessors, there are some differences in the way that they understand the nature of intercession. Christians believe that saints can intercede on behalf of the living because they are united with Christ, who is the mediator between God and humanity. In contrast, in the Islamic tradition, saints are believed to be able to intercede because of their personal relationship with God, and their ability to draw closer to Him through their devotion and good deeds.

**The authors are graduate students at The Centre for Social Justice and Ethics, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya*