

A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints: The Community of God's Friends. By Hans A. Harmakaputra. *Currents of Encounter*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022. x + 258 pages. \$68.00 (paper).

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In Christianity, saints are widely venerated as role models and even as intercessors. Similarly, veneration of saints is a widespread phenomenon in the Muslim world. Consequently, any attempt to demonstrate the fruitfulness of the hermeneutical method of comparative theology finds a promising field when turning to the comparison of the veneration of saints in Christian and Muslim traditions. Accordingly, and in the context of the increasing religious plurality, the Indonesian-born Protestant theologian Hans A. Harmakaputra asks: "Is it possible for Christians to recognise non-Christian saints?" (2). From the outset, Harmakaputra, who teaches at Harford International University for Religion and Peace in Connecticut, responds affirmatively to this question. His objective is thus to establish what he refers to as an "inclusive theology of saints" (2).

The content structure of Harmakaputra's book is readily comprehensible. In the first part, Harmakaputra distinguishes among Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim discourses on the saints (15–115). The second part of the book comprises three chapters, each devoted to a different dimension of the concept of a "saint." The first chapter explores the ways in which saints manifest and reveal aspects of God's self-communication (119–45). The second chapter examines the concept of the saint as reality that is hidden to the human eye (146–71). The final chapter, "Saints as Companions," considers the concept of the saint as a friend of God and guide to humanity (172–97). In the following chapter, Harmakaputra outlines an "Inclusive Christian Theology of Saints in Practice" (198–223). The "Conclusion" of the book summarizes the path taken and suggests further directions (224–29).

The theological positions to which the author refers are convincing. In particular, Harmakaputra encounters the view that Christians can recognize non-Christians as saints and even venerate them, as exemplified by the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner and his theology of the "anonymous Christian" (21–26). The interweaving of theology and anthropology in Rahner's work enables the understanding of the life testimonies of human individuals outside of Christianity as ways in which God can be experienced by believers of any religion. In addition to that, Elizabeth Johnson's concept of saints as "friends of God" and Jean-Luc Marion's idea of the "hiddenness of the saints" (26–34) provide a welcome foundation for the subsequent comparison between the Christian veneration of saints and the veneration of saints in Islam. From the Protestant perspective, Harmakaputra draws on the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich (45–62).

Harmakaputra's primary Islamic interlocutor is the Andalusian philosopher and mystic Ibn Arabi (d. 1240). Ibn Arabi is recommended insofar as in his mystical writings topics such as "friendship with God" and the "hiddenness of the saints" also appear. According to Ibn Arabi, the concept of "hiddenness" implies that the qualities of saints cannot be determined objectively by non-aligned observers. Rather, they represent distinctive forms of relationship with God that can only be discerned by those who themselves maintain a similar bond of friendship with God (111–15).

In a spirit of profound understanding, Harmakaputra presents and analyzes the various religious traditions for understanding and venerating saints. In his book, the similarities and differences between the respective scholars or religious communities are clearly identified. At the end of each chapter, the argumentation steps are summarized, and the next steps are looked forward to. Inevitably, this results in a certain redundancy in the presentation.

In terms of content, it is not surprising that morally exemplary people of any religious affiliation can set standards for Christians. If these individuals perceive themselves in religious terms, one may describe their relationship with the divine as "friendship." Hence, Harmakaputra's argument ultimately depends on how we conceive the term "saint." In the Catholic understanding, it requires not only the practice of veneration by the Christian faithful, but also official recognition by the Roman Magisterium. It remains an open question as to whether one can envisage Dietrich Bonhoeffer being officially recognized as a "saint" in the Catholic understanding.

Harmakaputra perceives Ibn Arabi's doctrine of the hiddenness of the saints as a significant enrichment of the Christian understanding and veneration of the saints (115). In fact, this understanding is very close to the concept of sanctity advocated by Jean-Luc Marion. Nevertheless, such a doctrine tends toward the esoteric. While the official "canonization" of saints in Catholic tradition aims to achieve a certain degree of objectivity, Ibn Arabi's mystical approach places a different emphasis. Thus, one might ask to which extent his reflections contribute to a deepening of the Christian understanding of holiness and the veneration of saints. Rather, Harmakaputra's comparison indicates the persistence of differences not only between Christianity and Islam, but also between Catholic and Protestant Christian denominations—not to mention the Orthodox traditions.

These observations do not detract from the quality of this study; rather, they demonstrate that Harmakaputra's comparative analyses of the veneration of saints in Christianity and Islam inspire further reflection in many ways.

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