

see how Gustafson's writing contributed to shaping the field of ethics and moving developments in Christian ethics forward.

— Roxanne M. Meshar

**NOAH'S OTHER SON:
Bridging the Gap Between
the Bible and the Koran
by Brian Arthur Brown
New York: Continuum
Books, 2007 242 pp, cloth.
\$26.95**

A "happy" prophecy seems an oxymoron, at least within the biblical definition of the term, but Brian Brown may actually have achieved such an anomaly in this study of the Koran and the Bible. In fact, not only does Brown seem prophetic in both the context and content of his project to illustrate the inherent richness of studying each text in the light of the other — thus enhancing understanding among the three "peoples of the book", Jews, Christians and Muslims — he seems positively prescient. On October 13, 2007, just months after this book was released, 138 Muslim scholars marked the close of Ramadan by sending a letter to Christian leaders appealing for a strategic dialogue between Christianity and Islam. As staid a periodical as *The Economist* noted

that, "as inter-religious initiatives go, (this) was spectacular".

Brown employs the tragedy of 9/11, and the even greater tragedy of the ill-conceived response to the horror of the World Trade Center attack, as his starting point. Setting the stage through an erudite examination of the foundational texts of both the Koran and Bible, and in particular the pre-Abrahamic stories of Noah and Noah's other son — the rebellious Canaan drowned in the flood — Brown strides into the midst of the complex cast of characters as the three great religions know and love them, adding new insight in the correlation of Arabic versions of familiar names and life stories, and details breathing new life and insight for Jew, Christian and Muslim alike.

The result is a sharing of what has been a pilgrimage, leading the author into the country of myth in the Joseph Campbell sense, where Brown has settled down and made it his own. Having pitched his tent, he invites the sojourner to join him, making both the scholar and the serious amateur more than welcome.

His style is engaging, sometimes humorous, but invariably respectful. He wrestles with complex issues of literary and historical criticism, and the vexing field of comparative textual analysis, and succeeds in rendering them accessible but never

simplistic. The book is reminiscent of Augustine's assessment of the Bible, like a river in which "a lamb might wade and a hippopotamus might swim".

This is not to say that all is comfort and conciliation. Brown will raise eyebrows and hackles with some of his observations. There is little comfort here for either the rigid literalist or the lukewarm liberal. His regular description of the three faith communities as "Abraham's dysfunctional family" ought to make the conscientious reader of each faith group squirm.

From time to time he skates close to a style of instruction that may be read as preachy, but no one can doubt his respect for the whole people of God's several books, even when he calls, echoing Muslim scholars to be sure, for an Islamic reformation.

His vision of Judaism as the "foundation", Christianity as the "spiritual temple", and Islam as the "dome" over all, will be disconcerting to some. And it ought to be noted that Brown's work tantalizes, begging the overwhelming task for an interfaith scholarly effort to attempt a comparative commentary on Old and New Testaments and Koran all together.

Some exception will be taken that worship ought to take preeminence over all else in

religion; the biblical message and the orthopraxy of Jew and Muslim alike would argue, as did the 138 Muslim scholars, that "worship and work must be one". Still, the quibbles are small. In the 21st century, it is clear that religion is the new politics, and will be for the foreseeable future. Brown's rephrasing of the Golden Rule, that we may "understand one another as we would wish to be understood" is a sign that, as a certain telecommunications giant suggests, the future may yet be friendly.

— James T. Christie

**EMPIRE AND THE
CHRISTIAN TRADITION:
New Readings of
Classical Theologians
Edited by Don H. Compier,
Kwok Pui-lan and Jorg
Rieger Minneapolis: For-
tress Press, 2007 \$35.00**

Thirty-two essays, chronologically arranged, and written by a variety of scholars, assess the contributions of theologians whose work the editors believe can increase our current understanding of the intersection of Christian tradition and Empire. As to just what is meant by "Empire", Joerg Rieger describes it as "massive