



Peace Be upon You: The Story of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Coexistence

Zachary Karabell

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The story of conflict and confrontation between Islam and the West has become daily news, but throughout the ages Muslims, Christians, and Jews have shared more than enmity and war: there is also a rich and textured history of coexistence that has all but disappeared from our collective memory. In this timely and revealing book, Zachary Karabell traces the legacy of tolerance and cooperation from the advent of Islam to the present day.

In an extraordinary narrative spanning fourteen centuries, Karabell introduces us to the court of the caliphs in Baghdad, where scholars of various faiths engaged in spirited debate. He evokes the wonders of medieval Spain, where Jewish sages, Muslim philosophers, and Christian monks together deciphered the meaning of God and the universe. He offers a portrait of the Crusades that goes beyond the rivalry of Saladin and Richard the Lionheart, and shows how Christians and Muslims lived side by side. And he paints a vivid picture of religious autonomy in the Ottoman Empire.

As he explores the growing tensions of the modern era, Karabell traces the rise of Arab nationalism, the redrawing of the Middle East map in the wake of World War I, and the increased hostilities following the creation of the state of Israel. Through it all, he reminds us that dialogue and friendship have always punctuated times of war and discord. Today, while some Muslims, Christians, and Jews engage in confrontation, others—in Dubai, in Turkey, and around the globe—find common ground. Remembering the legacy of coexistence and recognizing its prevalence even today is a vital ingredient to a more stable, secure world.

Peace Be upon You: The Story of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Coexistence Details

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From Reader Review Peace Be upon You: The Story of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Coexistence for online ebook

Azzam Syafiq says

A great read. In this troubled world we live in, where we hear stories of inter-religious conflicts almost everyday, this book reminds us of times where people of various faiths used to live peacefully. Granted, maybe they didn't always live happily with each other, but nonetheless willing to coexist with one another and just get along with their lives. Who would've thought that Muslim sultans during the Umayyad Empire regularly held court sessions with scholars of different faiths to hold interfaith talks, Christians would fight side-by-side with Muslims to fight invaders from threatening their homeland, the chief doctors of a lot of Muslim sultans were Jews, and Jews were some of the most successful businessmen during the whole era of Islamic civilization.

Yes, the history of Jew-Christian-Islam relations is not always peaceful, what with the Crusades and anti-semitic massacres, but if there were periods of peace between these Abrahamic faiths in the past, then the followers of these religions today can learn to develop trust with each other, and again create long-lasting peace.

Hind says

Currently reading...interesting history on interfaith relations among the Abrahamic traditions after the advent of Islam.

Carl says

This is an outstanding read, provides a good view of from the other side. Highly recommend.

Umar says

great book. highly recommended. the author has great writing style, very unbiased and impartial. lots of surprising facts that tear away the misconceptions. who knew a Jewish man once led the armies of the Caliph?

yaman says

Peace Be Upon You: The Story of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Coexistence charts not another course of conflict and confrontation between Islam and the West, but its cooperative coexistence - which has all but been forgotten in light of modern events. Fourteen centuries of history are covered here to assure this history of cooperation isn't forgotten: chapters discuss early Baghdad scholars who engaged in spirited debate with various faiths, medieval Spain where Jewish and Muslim philosophers and sages debated the meaning of

God, and even a Crusades where Christians and Muslims lived peacefully side by side.

Carole says

Simplistic view of past interactions of the 3 monotheistic religions, with much history glossed over especially related to the treatment of "average" Jews at the hands of the Muslims.

Joel Trono-Doerksen says

This one I would have given a 2.5. The beginning wasn't too bad and that's why it didn't get only two. As the book progressed however it felt like the author was looking down his nose at Islam. The book described various historical scenarios where Jews, Christians and Muslims interacted peacefully with each other. Much of it was non Muslims (People of the Book) living under Muslim rule. The author would repeatedly say that the Muslim leaders would "choose pragmatism over religious zealotry." This implies that the leaders were in fact bad Muslims but good people because they were pragmatists who didn't care about their religion. The author is basically saying that Muslim leaders couldn't be good people who allowed minorities to practice their religion and also pious Muslims. Another thing that annoyed me was the author's constant praising of the peace treaty between Jordan and Egypt with Israel. Both these countries are ruled by despots (this book was written pre Arab Spring) that continually torture their own people and give them no political rights. These peace treaties also put no pressure on Israel to stop its brutal treatment of the Palestinians. Lastly a lot of the facts about the Ottoman empire the author mentioned were false. Rhodes was conquered in 1522 not 1526 and Suleyman the Magnificent did not conquer Egypt, his father Selim the Grim did. To have some basic facts like this wrong kind of puts the rest of the writing in question. What other dates did he get wrong? The book also lacked sources and citations were put in intermittently. I'm not sure I would recommend this book to anyone.

Murtaza says

If this book was simply a pangloss of history it would be pretty boring; luckily however it is nothing of the sort. Tracing the vicissitudes of history and the changing relations between Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities (mostly in relation to Europe and the Near East), it is like a very enjoyable walking tour through history. He makes a strong case for treating these three religions like siblings: the times of animosity and harmony are woven into one another. There is no black-and-white narrative and if you really want to search for a history of conflict you can find that, but if you want to search for a history of peace you can find that as well.

There were lots of interesting historical episodes and events which I wasn't aware of that are narrated here, including the story of Sabbatai Sevi the Jewish messiah and the scholar/warrior Usama ibn Munqidh who wrote a story of his life living during the time of the Crusader states (added to my list to read). The book as a whole is written very engagingly and is a pleasure to go through. He doesn't belabor the minutiae of history (thankfully because most of it would be a retread) but focuses on the grand narrative of intercommunal relations. To surmise it, in times of security people are more tolerant and in times of insecurity they are less. When Muslim states were secure and confident they were sometimes exemplary in their treatment of minorities, in their modern age they have largely been neither. Same with Christian (or formerly Christian, states).

This is a good book to give the long view of things once more, the title makes it seem like it'll be a boring pamphlet but its really nothing of the sort. It makes a rational and sober case that coexistence is not just possible but has been the norm, even when Muslims have been fully Muslims, Jews fully Jews, and so forth. Recommended even to people who are familiar with contemporary and medieval Islamic history.

John says

Arabic "upon," not Christian "with." From that I surmised that this book might signal a skewed point of view, and indeed there's much more about Arabs and Islam than about Christians and Jews. It's a broad sweep history, how these peoples lived together mostly in harmony in the eastern Mediterranean since the times of Jesus and Mohammed. When Europe was in its "dark age" the Arabic community was at cutting edge of innovation, science and creativity. Later the region endured periods of moribund bureaucracy and tactless manipulations by condescending Brits and French. I gained an appreciation for things Islamic. Today, "millions go about their daily lives seeking only betterment for themselves and their families, uninterested in dogma, theology, and hatred." Example: Dubai.

Heather says

This is a fantastic narrative assessment of the long history of peaceful coexistence that predominated between the major religions, and a powerful explanation of the roots of the 20th century conflicts and the misconceptions about their origins. If you're interested in the modern Middle East, you need to read this argument.

Jim says

One wouldn't think it, but for 1,400 years, Islam coexisted quite nicely with both Judaism and Christianity. This is the subject of Zachary Karabell's excellent history, *Peace Be upon You: The Story of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Coexistence*. We are all too used to projecting the anxieties of the present back into history, just as we like to straight-line our future projections based on present-day conflicts.

Karabell goes all the way back to Muhammad and his early successors and shows that Christians usually suffered less under the Muslim yoke than from their fellow co-religionists. In fact, the reason for Islam's rapid spread is that Christians and Jews suffered less under Muslim rule than under, say, the Byzantines. When Ferdinand and Isabella banished the Jews from Spain, the Ottomans welcomed them in their empire in such cities as Salonika (Thessaloniki), which became a center of commerce and learning.

What really surprised me about **Peace Be Upon You** is its author's superb summary of the last 150 years, bringing together such diverse subjects as the founding of the Baath Party (by a Christian!), Lawrence of Arabia, the Hashemite monarchies, the Balfour Declaration, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the founding of Israel, and the rise of Aramco.

The book ends with a look at Dubai as portending (Karabell hopes) the future of Islam -- less concerned with Jihad than with something different:

What are we to make of a Muslim ruling family doing business with a gambling and leisure company run by Jews? Or a company owned by the royal family concluding real estate deals with an American Jewish real estate mogul who makes no secret of his ardent support for Israel? Or a city-state that borders a puritanical Saudi Arabia and acts as an escape valve for the same Saudis who accept the stricture of Wahhabi dogma at home? Or of a burgeoning state that annually draws half a million British tourists who are lured by the prospect of cheap shopping and beaches? What are we to make of Dubai, a city-state that epitomizes the excesses and successes of capitalism in a globalized age?

The book came out in 2007 and is not altogether up to the minute, but it is a valuable contribution in an era when there are all too many treatises that ignore the rich history of the Middle East and North Africa.

David says

Too often, even educated people assume Islam, Christianity and Judaism have always been in conflict. This book explores the complex, nuanced relations between people of these faiths throughout the ages, showing how - more often than not - cooperation, tolerance, respect, or indifference coexisted with tensions, or even were the prevailing sentiments. An admirable tour, accessible to anyone with even a little background in the history, of how religion is too simple a lens through which to look at the various interactions of politics, commerce and personal relations. Clearly, the author has an agenda, but it is one he supports with a tremendous amount of evidence. Reading this book has changed the way I teach about this region.

Caroline says

The traditional history of relations between Muslims, Christians and Jews is one of conflict. We all know it. We've all heard it, over and over, endlessly recycled in print media, news media, history texts. It's the lens

through which we view the current state of the world - Islam v. the West, secular liberalism v. fundamentalist religion, democracy v. authoritarianism. It's why western media automatically treats Islam as a threat, why Islamic countries are seen as violent, strife-torn and backward, why the Jews have a history of persecution, why people look askance at any woman in a hijab or any olive-skinned man on an aeroplane. Because it's not just now, we tell ourselves, it may be worse now but it's always been this way.

But it hasn't. History in general has a tendency to focus on the exciting bits, the wars and battles and conflicts, because it's those momentous occasions that tend to be the driving force behind change. But it's not the whole picture, far from it. For much of the past fourteen hundred years in the Middle East, under various Islamic empires, Muslims and Christians and Jews have lived together quite peaceably. Maybe not voluntarily or always entirely comfortably, but peace doesn't always mean perfect equality or even harmony. It means live and let live, and by and large that is what many of the caliphs did. These Islamic empires were not defined by the stereotypes we see today, of authoritarian clerics, a strangling of science and reason - medieval Cordoba or Baghdad were vibrant and flourishing centres of learning and enlightenment, beautiful architecture, art and poetry, a world apart from the brutal European nations of the time. And yes, it is true, Christians and Jews were second-class citizens in these places, but they were not massacred, beaten, persecuted, robbed or shunned. They lived under their own laws, allowed to practice their own religions, manage their own affairs, and men of talent and wisdom had the opportunity to rise to unimagined heights in the service of the caliphs.

Just as the West has forgotten this Islamic history, so in many ways has Islam itself. Islam was at its height in the Middle East when religion went hand-in-hand with science, when enquiry and interpretation of the Qu'ran was not just permitted but encouraged, in place of unquestioning acceptance and obedience, when Muslim regimes were flexible and could accommodate the talents of people of other faiths. It is surely no coincidence that the Enlightenment coincided with the rise of the West, and losing touch with these traits has led Muslim nations to inwardness and stagnation.

Some people will no doubt argue that Zachary Karabell is viewing this history with rose-tinted spectacles, that this book is an Islamic whitewash. Maybe it is, but maybe it's also necessary to err on the side of positivity and optimism. The history of Islam is not one of violence and intolerance, or if it is, then no more so than the history of Christianity - and yet we don't define Christianity by its worst episodes or its most intolerance pronouncements, nor do we damn all Christians because of the actions of the Ku Klux Klan or the Westboro Baptist Church.

Every day, in almost every country around the world, Muslims and Christians and Jews are neighbours, friends, colleagues. They live side by side, they work together, their children play together. It's not glamorous and it doesn't get much attention, but this is the real truth of coexistence. The terrorists and the politicians and the news-broadcasters and the clerics don't speak for them, and nor have they ever. But that fact rarely makes it into the history books.

Tara says

As a history, it's fascinating. Near the end, though, it jumps the boat. I found the author abandoned intellectual responsibility, and was eager to make everything appear rosy. He assumes, in a desperate bid for peace, that the intentions of all parties are decent enough. This is not accurate: he underestimates the a-religious element, such as power-hungry dictators and ferociously greedy foreign corporations. Real religious people do not kill each other, since virtually no religions condone that; those who do usually want to create excuses to get around the issue which their leader finds desirable. The facade of piety appeals to those who would exploit people for their own profit. Karabell ignores these motives in the Middle East

altogether. So, though I find the history in most of the book enlightening, I also found a willful naivety near the end which will only hinder those who work for peace. The problems in each area must be discussed, and not grouped together to be attributed to religious differences and then whitewashed away. That will only perpetuate the violence.

David Jones says

Christianity, meet Islam...

Karabell presents a fluid and spell-binding narrative about the evolution of the Islamic world. In the process, he dispels a great number of myths (e.g. that jihad is all about subjugating non-Muslims, that Judeo-Christian cultures have always been in conflict with Arab/Muslim cultures, et al.). In an attempt to establish peace as an ongoing practice, he falls short--an interesting point since that assertion serves as the basis of his title and he, the author, makes a point of criticizing Gibbons for an erroneous title. But I digress.

The author tends to lean in a pro-Muslim direction which may be forgiven based on his obvious attempt to de-alienate the culture. Peace Be upon You presents an overwhelmingly powerful summary of the true development of Islam that amounted to more than just sporadic terrorist attacks.
