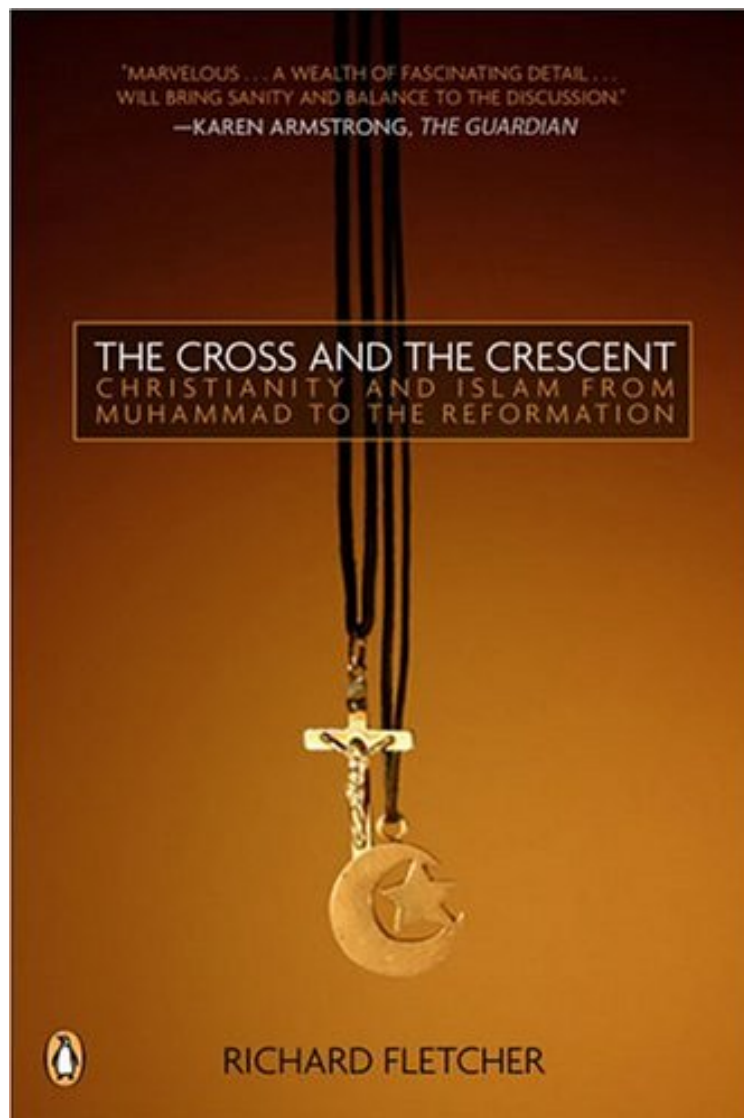


(Ebook pdf) The Cross and The Crescent: The Dramatic Story of the Earliest Encounters Between Christians and Muslims

The Cross and The Crescent: The Dramatic Story of the Earliest Encounters Between Christians and Muslims

Richard Fletcher

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Richard Fletcher : The Cross and The Crescent: The Dramatic Story of the Earliest Encounters Between Christians and Muslims before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Cross and The Crescent: The Dramatic Story of the Earliest Encounters Between Christians and Muslims:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. a wise commentary on medieval Muslim - Christian relationsBy doc

petersonRichard Fletcher is an emeritus professor from York University, whose *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* is a classic in the field of theological history. His short account of Christian / Islamic relations is similarly fascinating. Fletcher begins with a broad commentary on the dogmatic differences in religious texts: the Qu'ran, like the Bible is "revealed" knowledge - an understanding of man's role in the world through divine revelation. However, Fletcher points out, the nature of these revelations are telling: whereas the liturgical texts of Christianity are a "mass of myth, history, law, poetry, counsel ... no less than four versions of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, each one slightly different from the other three, ... and a work of apocalyptic prophesy unveling the imminent end of the world ..." Islam is much more doctrinally strict, without many of the ambiguities, contradictions and obscurities that Christianity has. The nature of Christian thought, then, is rooted in disagreement, debate and argument while the controversies of Islam primarily focus on the source of authority over the Islamic community (both politically and doctrinally.) These fundamental differences have shaped with ways in which followers of these brethern religions shape their view of the world.From here, the interactions between Islam and Christianity are explored in greater detail, Fletcher explaining how these religious perceptions shaped the ways in which these two communities saw each other. What I found particularly interesting was the co-existence of Christian and Muslim on the "frontiers" - in Iberia, Anatolia and (later) the Balkans, and how these groups interacted and responded to one another. For example, while Christians are "People of the Book" (and thereby tolerated under Islamic law), there were varying degrees of tolerance over time - from Christians and Jews acting as bureaucrats in the Ummayyad dynasty (early in Islam's history) to their place as very much second-class citizens after the Mongol conquest. Of course, such toleration was hardly the norm within Christendom, although I was suprized to learn of how much coexistence was the norm in Iberia before the Reconquista. Much of the book details the cultural, economic and especially intellectual interchange between communities in the middle ages.One point Fletcher makes almost in passing (and this is unfortunate), is that for much of Islam's early history, it was aloof of Christendom, instead looking East. The result was that the Muslim world was largely unaware of the developments being made in Europe (economically and politically) that eventually caused the Christian West to economically (and to a large extent in the 19th century, politically) eclipse the Muslim East. This, in part, lies at the root of Islamic disaffection with the West and its modern secularism. That it "could not be any other way than" what is was is moot - but a point that I wish he had addressed in greater detail.This reservation aside, its a very interesting short read. For those interested in comparitive religions, it won't answer many questions; rather, its strength is in showing the myriad similarities and sharings between faiths, even as each regarded the other with suspicion and (at times) hostility.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great OverviewBy a readerConcise and insightful. An excellent overview of the interaction between Christianity and Islam between the 7th and 15th centuries. The relevance of modern day issues is made clear, but modern day developments are not discussed and do not color the analysis. Helpful suggestions for further reading, which this book will tempt you to do.0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Dennis CarrInteresting!

In this immensely readable history that couldnt be more timely, award-winning historian Richard Fletcher chronicles the relationship between Islam and Christianity from the time of Muhammad to the Reformation. With lucidity and sound scholarship, Fletcher demonstrates that though there were fruitful trading and cultural interactions between Muslims and Christians during the period when the Arabs controlled most of the Mediterranean world, each group viewed the others religion from the beginning as fundamentally different and suspect. Eschewing moral judgments and easy generalizations, *The Cross and the Crescent* allows readers to draw their own conclusions and explore the implications for the present day.

.com Richard Fletcher reminds his readers that the scope of his book is limited, even though the story he is telling is not. An adept historian who writes with clarity and expertise, Fletcher sets for himself the nearly impossible task of relating the complex interrelations between the Islamic and Christian worlds from the 7th to the 16th centuries, focusing on the Mediterranean, but touching upon Northern Europe, Asia Minor, and even on the vast reach of the Mongol Empire. Fletcher describes the establishment of Islam in the 7th century and the subsequent rise of the Abbasid Empire a century later and describes the shift from an Islamic society defined by Arab ethnicity to a ruling power defined by religion and culture. Initially, Fletcher explains, Christians were tolerated (but disdained) in the fast-expanding Islamic world primarily because they provided a link to the ancient Greek and Roman learning their conquerors coveted. However, in less-receptive regions, such as North Africa, Church leaders fled to Sicily and southern France, weakening a Christian presence in those areas. While Fletcher provides many examples of interaction between the two worlds--including diplomacy, pilgrimage, trade, and most obviously, war (the Crusades)--he maintains that these contacts were never solidified by an earnest attempt on the part of these diverse cultures to "blend." In the best of times there was coexistence. In the worst, there was outright persecution. The reversal of Islamic supremacy took many centuries. Fletcher cannot explain the complex reasons for this in great detail. However, he does provide some provocative insight. The Islamic world flourished when it was most open to ancient thought.

Similarly, the groundwork for European hegemony was laid when 13th-century Christian thinkers began to absorb and expand on Islamic learning. By contrast, the Islamic world withdrew "from intellectual receptivity" at the height of its power. There is a lesson to be learned here. The exchange and integration of ideas can be mightier than the sword. -- Silvana Tropea

From Publishers Weekly

This illuminating study of Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle Ages shows just how intractable the conflict between Islam and the West has always been. Historian Fletcher (*Bloodfeud; Barbarian Conversion; etc.*), covers the period from the first Muslim conquests in the seventh century to the 16th-century peak of the Ottoman Empire. The story is one of frequent military conflict, but also of trade, diplomacy, technological diffusion and intellectual exchange as the Muslim world absorbed and elaborated the science and philosophy of the Greeks and then retransmitted them to Europe. Despite these far-reaching economic and cultural interactions, Fletcher argues, Christians and Muslims lived in "a state of mutual religious aversion," even in border regions like Spain where substantial populations of both faiths lived side by side; Christians viewed Muslims as bloodthirsty heretics, while Muslims sneered at Christian trinitarianism as a self-contradictory polytheism superseded by Muhammad's revelations. Fletcher's stress on early modern Europe's growing (but unrequited) openness to and curiosity about Islam as the key to the evolution of the notion of religious pluralism—a development rooted ultimately, he feels, in the multiplicity and diversity of Christian theological traditions—is fairly conventional rise-of-the-West historiography. Still, he ably synthesizes a mass of historical material on the ways in which people both accommodated and resisted the influence of alien religions in their lives. The result is a readable, nuanced account that raises profound questions about the role of religion and ideology in shaping our worldview. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist

Rather than comparing Islam and Christianity, historian Fletcher surveys the first 900 years of relations between the realms of Christianity and Islam. Following Muhammad's death in 632, an Arab-led Islamic empire explosively expanded to Persia in the east and Spain, via North Africa, in the west and absorbed the previously Christian Levant. When the Crusades began in 1095, Seljuk Turks rather than Arabs or the Persians who succeeded them ran Islam's empire. After the Crusades petered out two centuries later, the Ottomans seized leadership. They lost Spain but rubbed out Byzantium, charged into the Balkans, and by 1529, besieged Vienna. All this time, trade in goods between Christian and Islamic lands flourished. Exchange of ideas occurred mostly between Islamic Spain and Christendom, however, and finally Islam discouraged it altogether. The most striking common characteristic of Christendom and Islam for most of this period was denial of religious pluralism; indeed, no one of either faith formulated anything like it until modernity was at hand. An invaluable, nonpartisan review of some too-little-known history. Ray Olson

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