

REVIEW

Jesper Svartvik and Jakob Wirén, Eds.
Religious Stereotyping and Interreligious Relations

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This edited volume was developed in the wake of an international conference in Lund, Sweden held in April of 2011 and co-hosted by the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies at Lund University and the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem. Svartvik and Wirén, the editors of the volume and organizers of the original conference, have assembled a compelling collection of essays focused on relations among Jews, Christians, and Muslims that circle around a common commitment to “oppose stereotyping and prejudice” (p. ix). The twenty-two contributions by international scholars (both seasoned and emerging) come from a richly diverse range of disciplinary backgrounds including religious studies; theology; philosophy; history; international relations; Islamic theology; comparative literature; Jewish studies; peace and conflict studies; ethics; psychology; biblical studies; and interreligious studies. They are organized into five sections: Part I begins with “Methodological Considerations”; Part II covers “Christian-Muslim Relations”; Part III covers “Jewish-Christian Relations”; Part IV covers “Israeli-Palestinian Relations”; and Part V presents “Case Studies.”

As the disciplinary diversity of the authors suggests, this volume includes a wide range of creative entry points to the conversation about *Religious Stereotyping and Interreligious Relations*. While each essay merits engagement beyond the capacity of a single review, the contribution of the volume as a whole lies in the invitation of the editors (Svartvik and Wirén) to consider the particular contexts and cases of interreligious

interaction included in the collection through the lens of religious stereotyping. Each chapter adds data (from France, Nigeria, Scandinavia, the US; from film, literature, and news media; from sources both sacred and secular; and from contexts both contemporary and historical) to the ways that religious communities and beliefs have been a source of both healing and harm to others. Beyond descriptive discussions, each chapter implicitly or explicitly offers constructive clues to how we might mitigate harm and enhance healing between religions.

In his excellent introductory chapter, Svartvik notes that making generalizations is a necessary “cognitive shortcut” (p. 2) that we all employ. However, he distinguishes this from harmful negative stereotyping which fails to consider both group variability and the range of overlapping group identities we can occupy at the same time (e.g., sibling, spouse, parent, teacher, Muslim, etc.). An important insight in this chapter is that personal encounters, a mainstay of interreligious work, are not sufficient to break down prejudices because “we tend to change our beliefs about the individual much faster than we change our beliefs about the group” (p. 5). In other words, individuals who contradict our prejudices will just be categorized as “atypical” and can perversely serve to reinforce the stereotypes we hope to dismantle.

The perhaps misleading section heading “Methodological Considerations” contains four diverse chapters with different contributions to make. James Haire identifies distinct models of public theology. Pamela Sue Anderson and Werner Jeanrond explore the complex relationship between love and stereotyping. Finally, Jan Hermanson engages Gordon Allport’s book *The Nature of Prejudice* for its enduring lessons.

Part II, on “Christian-Muslim Relations,” contains six chapters detailing particular contexts but with a shared emphasis on perceptions of the religious “other” and the role of religion in the public square. Mona Siddique challenges us to think about the assumptions underlying our definitions of public vs.

private spaces as well as secular vs. religious spaces. Blandine Chélini-Pont uses her chapter to ask whether “religion produces more or less stereotyping and prejudice than any other system” (p. 76). Mohammad Fazlhashemi’s chapter “Occidentalism” explores the influence of this tradition on Muslim thinkers while comparing and contrasting it with Orientalism. Kristian Steiner focuses our attention on representations of Muslims and of Islam in two Swedish evangelical newspapers between 2006 and 2007. Jakob Wirén moves the conversation to consider stereotypes embedded in Christian theology. The final chapter in this section, by Thaddeus Umaru, zooms in on the dire consequences of religious stereotyping in Northern Nigeria.

Several of the essays in Part II, on “Jewish-Christian Relations,” have a strong historical bent, from Raymond Cohen’s focus on the trajectory of modern Catholic-Jewish relations to Johanna van Wijk-Bos’ discussion of “partiality” or chosenness in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, Gunnar Haaland surveys portrayals of Jews and Judaism in various children’s Bibles in Scandinavia. Mark Godin uses a statement from the Presbyterian Church in Canada to critique what he calls “Interfaith Monologues,” referring to frequent statements that many Christian denominations and other groups issue to articulate their stance towards another religious tradition. In an essay that may have been better paired with Hermanson’s essay in Part I, Deborah Weissman again takes up Allport’s *Nature of Prejudice*, this time to raise questions related to particularism and universalism.

Categories shift in Part IV from an emphasis on religious identity and interreligious relations to an emphasis on national identities and political relations. “Israeli-Palestinian Relations” includes three chapters that focus on the Palestinian *Kairos* document (Yohanna Katanacho); Christian discourse about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Peter Pettit); and views of Arabs in *halakhic* discourse in Israel (Ophir Yarden). All three highlight the consequences of generations of stereotyping,

prejudices, and discrimination on relations among and between Israelis and Palestinians.

The final section of the book includes three case studies: one related to *Jud Suss*, the 1940 film commissioned by Nazi minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels to promote anti-Semitism (Erik Hedling); the second focused on *The Artless Jew*, a 2001 book by Kalman Bland (Alana Vincent); and a third focused on a homophobic sermon delivered by a Pentecostal minister in Sweden that raises questions about the lines between free speech and hate speech (Linde Lindkvist).

As with any edited volume, some contributions are stronger than others. The dense, well-researched studies may appeal more to academics than practitioners, but the implications of the research are relevant for all those who work across religious lines to improve relations. The coherence of the volume comes more from the shared focus on stereotyping than the organization of the sections. I found myself wishing the chapters were grouped according to analytical or thematic headings rather than static descriptive categories. However, these are small concerns in light of the rich contextual narratives that are at the heart of so many of the contributions in the volume. I am grateful to the editors and participants in the original conference for making their scholarship available to a wider audience.