

Zeki Saritoprak, *Islam's Jesus*.
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Rita George-Tvrtković
Benedictine University, Chicago

In recent years, several scholarly books have focused on the Islamic Jesus ('Isa in Arabic); these include Tariq Khalidi's *The Muslim Jesus* (Harvard, 2003), Mathias Zahniser's *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity* (Orbis, 2008), and Mona Siddiqui's *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus* (Yale, 2014). Zeki Saritoprak's *Islam's Jesus* (Florida, 2014) is an admirable addition to this growing corpus. The book is not an overview of the Islamic Jesus in terms of his character or prophethood; rather its focus is on Jesus's eschatological role, specifically as it relates to the concept of *nuzul* (Jesus's descent from heaven at the end of time). In focusing on this topic, Saritoprak both builds on the work of others who have written on aspects of Islamic eschatology, such as *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, by Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (Oxford, 2002), and fills a lacuna in the literature by focusing his eschatological discussion

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on Jesus. The topic is interesting both as a discrete topic of Islamic theology and as a point of interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Christians. While Muslims do not believe that Jesus was killed or resurrected, they do believe in his ascension and second coming. And it is precisely on these points of Muslim-Christian divergence and convergence that Saritoprak dwells. The result is a “dialogue” between Muslim and Christian theology that makes this book especially valuable. Salient theological topics covered in the book include signs of the End, judgment, salvation, and Antichrist.

Aside from the importance of the subject matter, several aspects of Saritoprak's methodology are useful. First, he roots his discussion of Jesus's descent in the Qur'anic and *hadith* literature, and in so doing he includes a detailed description of various Muslim approaches to exegesis. Two chapters (7 and 8) contrast literal and allegorical interpretations of Jesus's second coming. Saritoprak is careful to include the full range of historical Islamic interpretations and mentions scholars from a variety of time periods, geographical locations, and doctrinal points of view. It is clear that Saritoprak's own exegesis leans more toward the allegorical; indeed, he says as much (on page 98) when he states that the descent of Jesus must be understood allegorically rather than as a physical miracle. It might be refreshing for Christian readers to see that Muslim scholars disagree about scriptural interpretation as much as Christians do.

Second, Saritoprak incorporates the insights of important contemporary Turkish exegetes like Gülen and Nursi into his discussion. Some of these Turkish scholars have never before been translated into English; in fact, the appendix includes a new

translation (by Saritoprak) of Muhammed Hamdi Yazir's Qur'anic commentary on the descent of Jesus.

And finally, probably the most useful aspect of Saritoprak's methodology is that it is inherently dialogical, which means that he has intentionally written this book for a twin audience: Muslims and Christians. As a Muslim scholar teaching at John Carroll University (a Catholic, Jesuit institution), Saritoprak seems to understand both audiences equally well, and throughout the book he makes it a point to define Islamic terms that might be unfamiliar to Christians. For example, he begins chapter 4 by explaining the difference between sound, weak, and fabricated *hadith*, a distinction that is necessary if one is to understand how *hadith* have been interpreted and used by Muslim scholars to buttress their discussions of Jesus's role in Islamic eschatology. One distinction Saritoprak could have made but did not is the one between Christian theology and Islamic *kalam*; he uses the term "Islamic theology" frequently throughout the book, but even a brief discussion of how *kalam* is not quite equivalent to Christian theology would have been useful, especially since the penultimate chapter, chapter 9, includes the word "theology" in its title. But aside from this small quibble, Saritoprak's carefully researched and well-written book addresses an important and interesting topic in a clear and engaging manner. In short, *Islam's Jesus* is a worthwhile and accessible read for Muslims, Christians, or anyone wanting to know more about 'Isa, Islam, and the End.