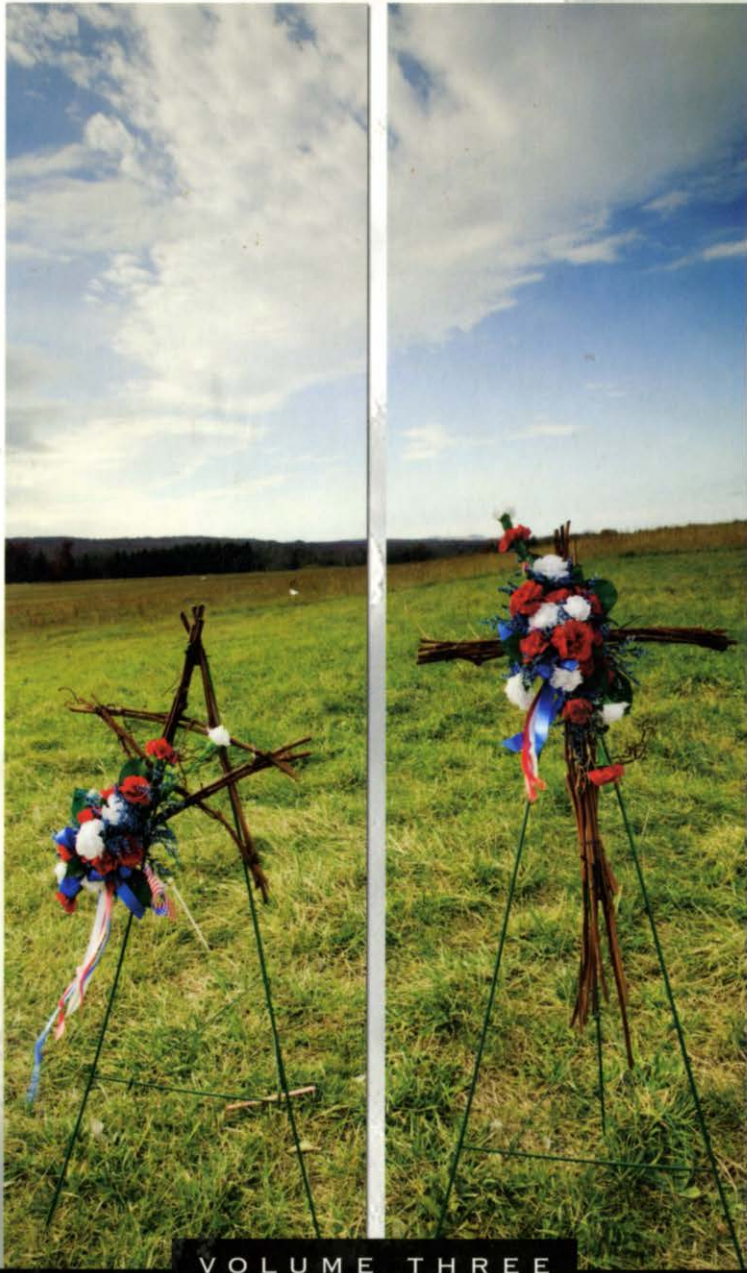


PRAEGER PERSPECTIVES

THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS AFTER SEPTEMBER 11



VOLUME THREE

The Interfaith Dimension

EDITED BY ARVIND SHARMA

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Volume 3
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An Analytical Inquiry into Islamic and Western Methodologies of Studying World Religions

Ahmad F. Yousif

In institutions of higher learning in the Muslim world, in contrast to similar institutions in Western countries, scant attention is paid to the field of comparative religion. This, however, was not always the case. Between the third/ninth and sixth/twelfth centuries (Islamic calendar/Gregorian calendar), Islamic civilization witnessed the rise—and also eclipse—of the discipline of *‘ilm al milal wa n-nihal* (literally, “knowledge of religious groups and sects”). According to Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, interest in learning about other faiths and in interreligious debate and discussion during this period was so high that these areas became subjects of “salon conversation” and a “public past-time.”¹

Among the works written during the heyday of comparative religious studies in Islamic history are: *Ar-Radd ‘ala n-Nasara* (“Refutation of the Christians”) by ‘Umar b. Bahr al-Jahiz (d. 255/869), *Al-Farq bayna l-Firaq* (“Differences among Muslim Groups”) by ‘Abd al-Qahir b. Tahir al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1038), *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (“Decisive Treatise on Religious Sects and Divisions”) by ‘Ali b. Ahmad b. Hazm (d. 456/1064), *Al-Radd al-Jamil li Uluhiyyat Isa bi-Sarih al-Injil* (“Proper Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus with Clear Evidence from the Bible”) by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1112), and *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (“Religious Sects and Divisions”) by Abu l-Fath ash-Shahrastani (d. 548/1154). Mention may also be made of such writers as Muhammad b. Jarir at-Tabari (d. 313/926), who wrote about the religion of the Persians; Abu l-Hasan al-Mas‘udi (d. 346/958), who wrote two books on Judaism, Christianity, and the religions of India; al-Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar (d. 415/1025), who devoted part of *Al-Mughni* to Muslim sects and to religions other than Islam; and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 440/1053), who wrote about religion in India and Persia.

After a lapse of about six or seven centuries, there is, today, renewed interest among Muslims in studying other religions and faiths. Notable works in this connection are: Faruqi’s *Christian Ethics*, *Triologue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, and *Islam*