

Volume 18 Number 2 (2024): 142-145

<https://openjournals.utoledo.edu/index.php/infactispax>

ISSN 2578-6857

**Book Review of** Jolyon Mitchell, Suzanna R. Millar, Francesca Po, and Martyn Percy, eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Peace*, The Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion series, Wiley Blackwell, 2022, 656 pp., €152.60 (Hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-119-42434-5.

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Jolyon Mitchell, Suzanna R. Millar, Francesca Po, and Martyn Percy have shepherded a substantial and tremendously valuable resource to publication in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Peace*. The collection embodies the very purpose of a “companion to” its topic of interest. It maps the state of the subfield such that a first-time reader would grasp central concerns raised, questions asked, and challenges faced therein. Moreover, the volume is as exhaustive as a singular resource could be. With a canon of fifty essays covering a broad spectrum of topics, it offers students and junior scholars a point of entry that is sure to pique their interest. Simultaneously, it contains innovative works that could enrich the thought of even the most senior scholar. All told, the volume constitutes a thorough and timely review of the state of academic work on religion and peace.

While complete as a standalone collection, this work also serves as a follow-up to *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, edited by Andrew R. Murphy (2011). In fact, the two share many of the same authors. Compiled just a

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decade following the attacks of 9/11, the earlier volume was prompted, according to Murphy, in large part by the nuance vacuum and extreme polarization that characterized post-9/11 discourse surrounding religion, violence, and peace. To illustrate, Murphy noted the ongoing interrogation of religion's supposed inherent tendency "toward violence, irrationality, and destruction," an accusation made by the prominent "New Atheists" of the time (2011, p. 1). This indictment and responses by notable religion apologists have shaped public discourse in the present millennium. Both volumes offer some attempt at a more comprehensive and balanced approach to the questions at hand, each directed toward the particular concerns of their own cultural moment.

This volume is divided into six sections. The group of chapters in the first, entitled "Religion and the Search for Peace," set the stage for the volume as a whole with a broad examination of religion and its relationship to violence and peacebuilding. Chapter 2, for instance, includes overviews of six different religions, though with varying specificities of focus. Chapters 3 and 4 by Ian S. Markham and Atalia Omer offer solid studies of the categories for evaluating religious thought and action with regard to peace. A fascinating interview with scholar and peacebuilder John Paul Lederach rounds out the section in Chapter 5.

The second section on "Religion and Peace in Local Contexts" cross-sections the globe with a look toward a diverse set of religious traditions. Several essays are based on field work or personal experience. Works from this section address questions that remain regrettably under-explored and propose novel and innovative approaches. That includes Chapter 6 by Victoria Biggs, which is subtitled "Listening to Young People in Israel/Palestine." She offers a unique analysis of innocence as a concept in public discourse between and about two communities "that lay in such close proximity but whose contact [is] circumscribed by ongoing violence and oppression" (p. 81). Similarly, Chapter 8 by Maryam Ahmad and James DeShaw Rae as well as Chapter 16 by Monica McWilliams and Avila Kilmurray challenge established presupposition surrounding gender norms and the role of women in social change. Chapter 11 by Farah Mihlar too defies common tropes by highlighting non-violent movements in Islam in contrast to violent ones within religions often portrayed as more peaceful. In Chapters 13 and 15, John W. de Gruchy and George R. Wilkes, two senior scholars, examine reconciliation as a site of both transformation and contested meaning.

The volume's third section centers on specific "Practices and Embodiments" that exemplify religion's potential for the promotion of peace. Hence, while less focused on theory, it stands out for bearing qualities that make it useful for scholar-activists. For instance, in Chapter 18, Helen M. Hintjens

highlights the ethical, legal, and practical dilemmas frequently faced by religious organizations aiding undocumented persons. Similarly, in Chapter 19, Clive Barrett examines museums as spaces for preserving narratives of justice and fostering a more peaceful future. Like several other works in this section, these are genuinely original, exceptionally well-researched, and valuable for their historical overviews and concrete recommendations.

The essays of the fourth section narrow their focus to “Lived Theologies and Building Peace.” This section brings to light Christianity’s long history of culpability for violence, which is held in fraught tension with the resources for peacebuilding found within its rich traditions. That dichotomy is made clear, for instance, in Chapter 27’s reexamination of the Civil Rights Movement. There, Dean J. Johnson calls for the abandonment of any simplistic or nostalgic vision of the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. Such whitewashing fails to reflect King’s belief, to quote Johnson, that “revolution is possible [...] only through radical nonviolence” (p. 331). Additionally, Alastair McIntosh’s Chapter 29 on “Spiritual Activism, Atomic Theology, and ‘The Bomb’ in Scotland” stands out among the section’s essays. It incorporates advocacy, scholarship, and biography all at once, and it is especially apropos, given the renewed concern over nuclear arms ethics that has accompanied revived interest in the life and work of J. Robert Oppenheimer.

The fifth section, entitled “Just War, Just Peace,” offers fresh perspectives on an established tradition with ancient roots. Its reflection is prompted by “the profound ambivalence occasioned in this area by religion” (p. 15). Chapter 34 by Marc LiVecche and Nigel Biggar gives an overview of the topic that is both original and well-written. Jason A. Springs’ essay, “Can Restorative Justice Transform Structural and Cultural Violence?” (Chapter 37) stands out as one of the best in the volume thanks to the balance met between clear articulation of theory, helpful examples, and new insights surrounding concerns far from exhaustively addressed. Like many of the essays in the volume, it also flaunts an impressive bibliography. Tobias Kelly’s brief essay in Chapter 38, “The Humanitarian Conscience between War and Peace,” explores an original question while parsing out a genuine dilemma. This penultimate section closes with a predictably excellent essay from R. Scott Appleby, one of the contemporary “fathers” of the subfield of religion, violence, and peace.

The final section on “Religion and Peace on a Global Stage” considers, among other things, religion’s role in peace agreements and genocide prevention as well as its resources for future efforts. Megan Shore provides an especially valuable overview in Chapter 41. In the next chapter, John D. Brewer’s sociology-based

essay places this important topic in a new light that seems to offer a complement to some of the volume's more descriptive pieces. Chapter 44 by Robert Forster and Christine Bell on "Divine Intervention: Invoking God in Peace Agreements" feels uniquely actionable among the volume's essays. Lastly, with its focus on "Religion and Peacebuilding in the Ukraine-Russia Conflict," the final chapter by Jolyon Mitchell gives the volume a forward thrust toward emerging dilemmas the subfield is sure to face.

Overall, the strength of this volume lies in the urgency, breadth, and quality of its subject matter. It brings together thinkers from anthropology, archeology, ethics, history, journalism, law, philosophy, political science, religious studies, sociology, and theology, among others. It does, however, suffer from occasional pitfalls inherent to such a mammoth project. At times, for instance, the jargon-heavy nature of certain chapters fails to reflect its broad, interdisciplinary audience. Similarly, the specificity of some essays to their own discipline assumes a level of expertise the likes of which no singular reader could possess in all cases. For example, there was often mention of relatively obscure, discipline-specific figures—sometimes by last name alone—without contextualization or explanation. Finally, it was clear that not every chapter was as essential as the next. The volume would have been made stronger by excluding some extraneous chapters, ones more fit for peer-reviewed journals. What remains true is that, despite any shortcomings, this companion would be a valuable addition to any library or collection.

In the short period since this volume's publication, events have almost certainly reshaped our understanding of religion's relationship to violence and peace for the foreseeable future. Just one year later, on October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a series of terrorist attacks on Israel. These actions prompted the subsequent Israeli occupation of Gaza that has claimed tens of thousands of lives, combatant and non-combatant alike. The onslaught of heart-wrenching stories that have emerged from this and other global conflicts will keep those devoted to the cause of peace on a righteous path. As many head to mosques, synagogues, churches, and the halls of government in pursuit of a fragile ceasefire or, better yet, a sustainable peace, volumes like this one can offer a resource for the trials of that great mission

### **Additional References**

Murphy, Andrew R. (Ed.). (2011). *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*. Blackwell Publishing.