
NEW TITLES

History

THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM: Judaism, Christianity, Islam
by F. E. Peters
Princeton, 1982
216 pp. \$14.50

Jews, Christians, Muslims—the “three peoples of the Book”—share a common heritage. All three embrace the original Covenant with God; the latter venerate the Hebrew scriptures, though they have acquired their own distinctiveness through new revelation. Similarities beyond monotheism (e.g., dietary restrictions) have led some scholars to consider early Christianity a Jewish reform movement and Muhammad a Hebrew fundamentalist. Neither rejecting nor endorsing such notions, Peters, a professor of Near Eastern studies at New York University, contrasts the three groups’ approaches to scripture, theology, law, community, and mysticism as they successively developed between the sixth century B.C. and the 11th century A.D. Attempting to make faith “rational,” all three borrowed from Greek thought. And all were enriched by esoteric sects (Cabalism, Gnosticism, Sufism) that emphasized private revelation. In a more worldly vein, Peters notes that taxation, “which fell under secular jurisdiction in the Christian Roman Empire and was imposed upon Jewish communities from without, was part of the preserve of religious law in Islam.” Not least among Peters’ accomplishments is his explanation of how three “sharers of a common sacred history,” under pressure of different circumstances (e.g., Christianity’s adaptation to the Roman Empire, Islam’s struggle with tribal rivalries), grew to be so distant from one another.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR: Christian Chivalry and the Crusades: 1095–1314
by Stephen Howarth
Atheneum, 1982
321 pp. \$18.95

In 1314, a commission of cardinals found Jacques de Molay, last Master of the Order of the Temple of Solomon, guilty of sodomy, heresy, and idolatry and burned him at the stake. Ever since, the Knights Templar have been portrayed by historians as either saints or miscreants. Howarth, a historian and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, ar-