

NEIGHBORING FAITHS

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today

David Nirenberg

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are usually treated as autonomous religions, but in fact across the long course of their histories the three religions have developed in interaction with one another. In *Neighboring Faiths*, David Nirenberg examines how Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived with and thought about one another during the Middle Ages and what the medieval past can tell us about how they do so today.

There have been countless scripture-based studies of the three “religions of the book,” but Nirenberg goes beyond those to pay close attention to how the three religious neighbors loved, tolerated, massacred, and expelled one another—all in the name of God—in periods and places both long ago and far away. Nirenberg argues that the three religions need to be studied in terms of how each affected the development of the others over time, their proximity of religious and philosophical thought as well as their overlapping geographies, and how the three “neighbors” define—and continue to define—themselves and their place in terms of one another. From dangerous attractions leading to interfaith marriage; to interreligious conflicts leading to segregation, violence, and sometimes extermination; to strategies for bridging the interfaith gap through language, vocabulary, and poetry, Nirenberg aims to understand the intertwined past of the three faiths as a way for their heirs to produce the future—together.

DAVID NIRENBERG is the Deborah R. and Edgar D. Jannotta Professor of Medieval History and Social Thought and the Roman Family Director of the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, both at the University of Chicago. His most recent book is *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*.

"*Neighboring Faiths* provides a cogent and powerful intervention into one of the most debated topics and thorniest issues in the history of the late medieval West: How did Christians, Muslims, and Jews live with each other and think about one another? The book will be of extraordinary importance not only for specialists in the field but also for general readers and anyone interested in the relations among the three religions and in the enduring discussion on 'the clash of civilizations,' an argument Nirenberg demolishes in an elegant but forceful manner. There are no books presently in print that even approach Nirenberg's in terms of its themes, thoroughness, or interpretive thrust."

—TEOFILO F. RUIZ, University of California, Los Angeles

"Using medieval Iberia—the 'land of three religions'—as his principal point of departure, Nirenberg highlights the dynamic, often ambivalent and fractious, yet interdependent relationship among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Whether focused on matters of scripture or sexuality, philosophy or poetry, conversion or conflict, he offers a brilliant and provocative demonstration of medieval conceptions of both race and religion. *Neighboring Faiths* is scholarship at its very best, successfully challenging current notions about the so-called clash of civilizations and even Benedict XVI on the supposed incompatibility of Christianity and Islam."

—RICHARD L. KAGAN, Johns Hopkins University

"*Neighboring Faiths* maneuvers masterfully between readings of the tense and sometimes violent multicultural Iberian past and bold assessments of their lessons for our tense and sometimes violent multicultural present. Nirenberg has an uncanny knack for dwelling on—and in—interstices, and for asking the difficult questions that 'being between' often prompts. This is a keenly intelligent, cautionary collection—one that makes eloquent connections across the centuries."

—PETER COLE, author of *The Dream of the Poem:
Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950–1492*

"Nirenberg succeeds in cultivating a sensibility that allows us to discover in the past a stimulus to critical awareness about the workings of our own assumptions about the relations among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and habits of thought. Among those habits is the conviction that our religious traditions are independent of one another, that they are stable, and that one contains truth and tolerance while the others do not. Conversely, this book proposes the *interdependence* of these religions, a process in which they are constantly transforming themselves by thinking about one another in a fundamentally ambivalent form of neighborliness."

—MERCEDES GARCÍA-ARENAL RODRÍGUEZ,
Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid