

The Religion by Tim Willocks Jonathan
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The Religion is a novel that tells many stories, set against the background of the struggle between Christianity and Islam in the 16th century, exemplified by the bloody and terrible siege of Malta by the armies of the Turkish Sultan.

The hero, Mattias Tannhauser, is an amoral rogue of immense charm and likeability, and the arch villain, a priest of the Inquisition, as sinister as one of his ilk should be.

What dominates the book, however, is the siege, and the detail with which it is told, and the unrelenting horror of it, for page after page, do not make for an easy read; it is not often that I find my sleep haunted by what I have read during the day, or evening, but that happened with The Religion, and when you read it - and you need a strong stomach too - you will see why.

Though The Religion is set in the 16th century, there is a strong, underlying connection with contemporary events and the much vaunted 'clash of civilisations' talked up by Huntington, among others.

The Religion is a name for the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, with whom the Turkish armies clashed on Rhodes and who they are now determined to destroy. Both sides believe they are doing God's will, both believe they have divine support, and both, while evincing great piety, are eager to perform acts of remarkable and enthusiastic brutality upon their 'infidel' enemy. If Willocks set out to make a telling point about religious myopia, and the damage inflicted by the demonisation of 'the other' he has succeeded; if it is unintentional the point still loses none of its force.

The bloodiness of the story will not appeal to everyone, but if you can still your stomach The Religion is an excellent read.

Rabbi DR Charles H Middleburgh