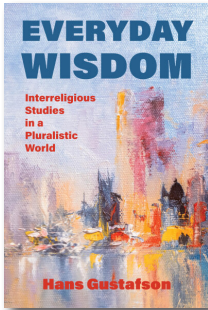


BOOK REVIEW

Everyday Wisdom: Interreligious Studies in a Pluralistic World.

By Hans Gustafson. Fortress Press, 2023. 392 pages. \$45.00 (paperback).
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In the introduction, Hans Gustafson describes how this book, through the framework of practical wisdom (phronesis) for everyday encounter, examines the contemporary study of the relations between various religious, nonreligious, and spiritual traditions, ways of life and worldviews. He believes the book will be useful to both scholars and students, especially in light of the growing consensus among universities that students need to acquire interfaith skills to become successful and responsible citizens in pluralistic societies. The volume is structured in two parts with a transitional intermezzo chapter. Part I introduces interreligious studies within the academic study of religion, while Part II introduces the topic of interfaith engagement. The intermezzo (Chapter 8) teases out the relationship between interreligious studies and engagement, including tensions and alliances.

The first two chapters provide a firm foundation for the rest of the book. Chapter 1, begins with detailing how religion is a contested concept with no universally agreed upon definition, concluding that the definitions of and approaches to the study of religion change over time, and thereby involve a continuing retooling process. The chapter concludes by defining interreligious studies as a discipline that “investigates the relations and interactions between, among, and within individual and groups in diverse religious contexts” (21), noting the growing and developing usage of the term. Chapter 2, “Global Religious Identities,” provides detailed statistics about the global religious landscape. He notes that the percentage of religious persons globally will grow (from 83% to 86%) by 2050, while there will be simultaneous growth in the religiously unaffiliated in the United States and Europe. These statistics lead to a discussion of the complicated nature of religious identity.

Chapter 3, “Messy Religion,” flows directly from the previous chapter’s discussion of religious identity. This chapter focuses on the messiness of religion itself because, as Gustafson asserts, religions are fundamentally dynamic, blended, and syncretic. He expands on the many definitions and incarnations of syncretism, avoiding the pejorative notion that it always involves the contamination of a religion by outside influences. Instead, the chapter focuses on the hybridity inherent in all religion, engaging many scholarly voices on the subject. Chapter 4 continues along these lines, examining the phenomenon of multiple religious orientation. While Gustafson contends that the facts indicate that multiple religious orientation is rare, multiple religious practice, where religious blending occurs in varied ways, is more widespread.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the lived religion approach. The first of these chapters describes how this approach focuses on everyday practice rather than organizations and theologies. Chapter 6, “Lived Religious Encounter,” emphasizes the well-worn truism that “interreligious engagement is not between *-isms*, but is between people” (120). The author goes on to demonstrate how utilizing the lived religion approach in interreligious studies and interfaith engagement reveals the complexity of traditions and the individual nature of each person’s religious experience.

The final chapter in Part I, “(Inter)religious Literacy,” begins with the multiple ways that religious literacy can be defined and measured. The chapter wrestles with the question, is (inter)religious literacy enough? Gustafson ultimately concludes that literacy must be coupled with interreligious practical wisdom (*phronesis*). This assertion leads directly into the *intermezzo* between the two parts of the book. Here, he teases out the tensions between interreligious studies and interfaith engagement, advocating for a scholar-practitioner model that combines theory and practice.

Part II focuses on interfaith engagement, beginning with a detailed discussion in chapter 9 of the debate/discussion over the usage of interreligious or interfaith, examining the promise and pitfall of each term. The chapter also discusses other terms including multifaith, worldview, and lifeway. Chapter 10, “Encountering Religious Diversity,” discusses human responses to religious diversity, focusing mainly on a schema laid out by Eboo Patel of Interfaith America, but also highlights other voices, including Milton Bennet, developer of the Intercultural Sensitivity Continuum, theologian Ramon Panikkar, and sociologist Robert Putnam.

Chapter 11, “Pluralism(s) and Secularism(s),” defines the terms secular, secularism, secularization, and secularity in order to tease out how the nonreligious fit into the interfaith encounter. He follows with a discussion of pluralisms, in their many forms, giving particular attention to the works of Peter Berger and Diana Eck. Chapter 12, “Theological Encounter,” turns toward theological framing of the interreligious encounter, distinguishing between confessional theology and academic theology. He details several ways academic theology can approach this encounter, including comparative theology, interreligious theology, and transreligious theology.

The final three chapters of the book take on more practical concerns in the interreligious encounter, including “Friendship Across Difference” (Chapter 13), “Practice Interfaith Wisdom” (Chapter 14), and “Everyday Leadership” (Chapter 15). The middle chapter of these three is where Gustafson most clearly lays out his own view of what is needed to be effective in interfaith relationships. He describes interfaith phronesis (practical wisdom) as having four dimensions: know what (basic religious literacy), know who (empathic religious engagement), know why (self-knowledge and awareness), and know how (dialogue and leadership skills).

Everyday Wisdom is well-researched and well-written, covering a broad range of topics in the areas of interreligious studies and interfaith engagement. While the breadth of the book is wide, it does not sacrifice on depth. Each chapter delves deeply into its subject, always providing multiple theories and viewpoints. The book is scholarly, combining the works of noted thinkers with the most recent statistics and trends, while at the same time accessible, describing complex ideas using understandable terminology. In this way, *Everyday Wisdom* combines theory and practice. There is little negative to say about this work. In the introduction, Gustafson states that “the work is for students and scholars seeking a scholarly introduction to the contemporary study of interreligious relations” (5). I would caution using the entire book with undergraduate students, due to the sheer volume of information, but I do think parts of it would be incredibly useful for students at all levels, while its depth and impeccable referencing would be useful to the scholar of religion and the practitioner of interreligious engagement. Gustafson has significantly contributed to the field of interreligious studies with this volume. I look forward to his next work on the subject.

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