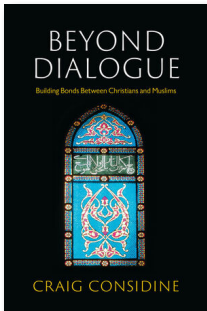


BOOK REVIEW

Beyond Dialogue: Building Bonds Between Christians and Muslims

By Craig Considine. Polity Press, 2025. 256 pp. ISBN: 978-1-5095-5528-4.
\$24.95 (paperback); \$20.00 (e-book).



Craig Considine is a Roman Catholic sociologist at Rice University with an enduring interest in interfaith dialogue. In this latest book, he uses the acronym DEUCE to outline five principles (Dialogue, Education, Understanding, Commitment, Engagement) that he describes as a “mechanism to build more bonds between Christians and Muslims, and subsequently between the West and the Ummah” (2).

The book is structured thoughtfully, with each of seven chapters focused on a geographic region: the Arabian Peninsula, Europe, Asia Minor, South Asia, Africa, the United States, and Israel and Palestine. He includes a short summary of key historical events and factors impacting Muslim-Christian relations in those regions. Each chapter is titled with a single word beginning with the letter “H”: humanity, hybridity, heterogeneity, honor, harmony, healing, and holiness. The author uses the title as a key concept for examining the relevant issues and advancing the state of Muslim-Christian relations.

Each chapter is divided into three parts, corresponding to three paradigms through which to view the kinds of Muslim-Christian engagement happening in the region addressed in the chapter. The first part, “Clash of Civilizations,” highlights examples of conflict, oppression, or injustice between Christians and Muslims. In the second part, “Dialogue of Civilizations,” the author highlights examples of mutual understanding and relational connections across Muslim and Christian communities. And in the third part, Considine gives examples of what he calls the “Synthesis of Civilizations,” which he describes as cooperation and “civic synthesis” among Muslims and Christians to “create a new kind of community” that aspires to more than mere mutual understanding.

The careful structure adds to the usefulness of the book for future reference and commends it as a worthy addition to reading lists for students and interested readers. Sometimes, however, the author seems to be a victim of his rigid structure. By insisting on using an “H” word as the title and key sociological concept for each chapter, he has to interpret or apply those concepts in ways that sometimes feel awkwardly shoe-horned to fit the context. For example, he applies the term “holiness” in a way that just seems synonymous with his “DEUCE” perspective. The ideas in the chapter are valuable, but they fit awkwardly under the heading of holiness, a concept which otherwise has a robust history of usage in both Muslim and Christian literature.

Considine thinks of his “Synthesis of Civilizations” as a unique contribution to the field of Muslim-Christian engagement. While his use of that term may be unique, promoting greater degrees of collaboration and cooperation between Muslim and Christian communities, particularly in civic and social spheres, and in a way that deeply influences both communities, is not a novel approach or goal in the world of interreligious engagement. The content of those sections in each chapter is encouraging, as the author cites examples of this kind of cooperation, and his insights about the possibility of future engagement are also worth considering.

It is admirable that Considine rejects a “syncretistic” approach to dialogue and is explicit about not promoting a synthetic new religious system composed of a blend between Muslim and Christian doctrines and practices. However, his use of “pluralism” as a religious term is somewhat ambiguous, at least from a philosophy of religion perspective. He describes pluralism as a step beyond “tolerance” and goes on to characterize it as the “process whereby human beings of diverse backgrounds embark upon the ‘energetic engagement’ with religious diversity” (4). Seeking out experiences of cultural diversity and “engaging energetically” with people of different faiths is a crucial virtue for participants in interreligious dialogue. And pluralism is sometimes used to mean just that kind of engagement. However, I think it is important to distinguish it from the more technical philosophical and theological context where religious pluralism refers to an epistemological claim that more than one set of religious propositions or systems can have equal claim to truthfulness, even when they appear to contradict one another. That kind of religious pluralism is sometimes taken as a precondition for interfaith dialogue, which undermines the potential value of dialogue, since a vast majority of Christians and Muslims will never be religious pluralists. I think Considine’s thesis is consistent with a “confessional” approach to dialogue that doesn’t require Muslims and

Christians to abandon the conviction that their respective religious systems are uniquely true; and it may be helpful for him to make that distinction or even include a more theological refutation of “syncretism” and (this kind of) religious pluralism.

The historical overview of each geographical region is informative and successfully inspires hopefulness for greater degrees of understanding and cooperation among Muslims and Christians. Having lived in Turkey and Cyprus for many years and studied the political and religious landscape of those places, I am more qualified to weigh in on those sections. I heartily agree with the author’s criticism of Erdoğan, although I think he doesn’t go far enough in exposing how detrimental his regime has been to religious freedom.¹ The murder of a Catholic priest,² an Armenian journalist,³ and three Protestant Christians⁴ in recent years reveal inadequate systems of protection and justice and alarming levels of government cover-up and collusion. Since 2016 hundreds of foreign Christians have been targeted and deported as “threats to national security” simply for associating with Turkish Protestant churches or organizations. This includes non-Turkish Christians who are married to Turks.⁵ The author’s treatment of the Gülen movement might also benefit from a bit more nuance. It is undeniable that Erdoğan served the Gülenists up as a convenient scapegoat after the failed coup attempt in 2016, but it also seems evident that prominent members of the movement were, in fact, involved in the attempted coup; and in the years leading up to those events Gülen seemed eager to leverage his religious

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- 1 See: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Country Update: Turkey (Türkiye): Religious Freedom Conditions in Turkey*, by Susan Bishai. Y 3.R 27:19/T 84/, 1095-A-06, Government Publishing Office, 2024. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-07/2024%20Turkey%20Country%20Update_0.pdf.
 - 2 “Priest’s murder sparks press anguish,” *BBC News* February 7, 2006. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4689172.stm>
 - 3 “Turkey: ex-police heads jailed over 2007 journalist killing,” *AP News*, March 26, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-police-journalists-istanbul-trials-fe8185f3ecc04b8294d90fe6951de5b4>
 - 4 “Turkish police probe Bible killings amid shock,” *Reuters*, August 9, 2007. <https://www.reuters.com/article/economy/turkish-police-probe-bible-killings-amid-shock-idUSL1975999/>
 - 5 See the US State Department’s 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: US Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, *Turkey (Türkiye) 2023 International Religious Freedom Report*. Government Publishing Office, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkey/>

influence for political power.⁶ At the conclusion of the book, Considine announces that he has joined an organization founded by Enes Kanter Freedom, a Turkish-background former NBA player in the United States who has also been open about his affiliation with the Gülen movement in the past.⁷ An unqualified endorsement of that movement isn't likely to engender trust among the majority of Turkish Muslims.

Similarly, the section about Cyprus could benefit from more nuance, particularly from a Turkish Cypriot perspective. The author distinguishes between "Christian Cypriots" and "Muslim Turks" on the island as if the Turkish Cypriot population is somehow less legitimately "Cypriot" than their ethnically Greek counterparts (74). A vast majority of Greek Cypriots are happy to acknowledge that they share a common Cypriot identity with Turkish Cypriots who have been on the island for centuries. A few pages later the author does use the term "Muslim Cypriot," presumably to refer to Turkish Cypriots, but again the term is insufficient, since there are many Turkish Cypriots who are also Christian. For residents of the island, the choice of vocabulary is a matter of no small importance. Similarly, the author sides unambiguously with the Greek Cypriot version of events surrounding the division of the island in 1974 and characterizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as "belonging to Turkey" (76). Citizens of the TRNC would almost unanimously (and correctly) reject that characterization, and this chapter would likely alienate a Muslim audience in Cyprus. The "Synthesis of Civilizations" section of this chapter is excellent, however, and offers a helpful overview of some key issues and events while also providing fodder for fruitful discussion and development.

One of the most encouraging elements of the book is the author's willingness to recognize the minority Christian populations in the regions he highlights in each chapter. He directly addresses the persecution and oppression of Christians around the world and takes seriously the often small and embattled communities of local Christians who have converted from Muslim backgrounds. And, of course, he has an equally direct and honest approach to the history of discrimination and exploitation of Muslims in places like the United States.

6 Leela Jacinto, "Gülen admits meeting key figure in Turkey coup plot, dismisses Erdogan's 'senseless' claims," *France24*, July 18, 2017. <https://www.france24.com/en/20170718-gulen-admits-meeting-key-man-turkey-coup-plot-dismisses-erdogan-senseless-claims>

7 "NBA star Enes Kanter cuts ties with family over Gülen," *BBC News*, August 9, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-37024429>

Considine's book is overwhelmingly successful in providing an overview and a way forward for Muslim-Christian engagement, notwithstanding the need for more nuance in the sections mentioned above. Detail and nuance are difficult to capture in a book with such a broad scope and this volume will undoubtedly be helpful to readers as an introduction and as a reference.

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