

## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

### **Axel M. Oaks Takacs**

I am excited to see the publication of Issue 51 of the *Journal of Interreligious Studies*. This issue marks the third for which we are offering print editions for purchase. Editors, staff, and Board Members at Interreligious Studies Media are delighted to support this option as we continue to develop the journal, Interreligious Studies Press, and our other scholarly and educational material on the ISM website ([www.interreligiousstudies.org](http://www.interreligiousstudies.org)).

Issue 51 comprises six articles, two scholarly reflections, and one book review.

In “Rethinking Space and Place as Loci for Polyphonic Consciousness: A Case for a Spirituality of Inclusivity,” SimonMary Asese Ahiokhai draws on Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to argue that religious and secular identities are formed through space and place, and so can never be closed off from others. Critiquing ideas of identity built on exclusion and on claims to purity, the author proposes a “spirituality of inclusivity” in which understanding oneself always requires understanding the other. The essay focuses on pilgrimage, especially the Hajj, along with Jewish and Christian ideas of sacred space, as practices that unsettle insular belonging and train practitioners in hospitality. By replacing a scarcity mindset with a “surplus mindset,” the article offers a phenomenological basis for encounters between religious and secular traditions.

In “Independent Churches and Black Liberation Theology in Africa: What Interactions?,” Rodrick Kapwa traces the intertwined histories of the African Independent Churches (AICs) and Black liberation theology, focusing mainly on Francophone Africa and South Africa. The AICs emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as protests against colonial domination and missionary Christianity. Kapwa argues that the relationship between the AICs and Black liberation theology ran both ways. The AICs’ preached, contextual theology gave Black liberation theology fertile ground to grow from, and Black liberation theology in turn gave the AICs theological legitimacy. Kapwa concludes that, because the

AICs and Black liberation theology sit between missionary Christianity and traditional African religions, they offer a hermeneutical framework for interreligious and intercultural dialogue in contemporary Africa.

In “University Chaplaincy in Global Context: The First 25 Years of the International Association of Chaplains in Higher Education (IACHE),” Gregory W. McGonigle offers the first institutional history of this global network of university chaplains and campus ministers. The article draws on documentary records, archival materials, and oral histories with organizers and participants. It traces the association from its first conference in Vancouver in 2000 through its seventh, held in Frankfurt and Mainz in 2026, and follows how its gatherings grew from mostly Christian and Jewish participation into an increasingly multifaith and Humanist community. McGonigle then turns to recent structural changes and efforts to bring in chaplains from Africa, Asia, and South America. He argues that IACHE offers a valuable platform for international dialogue and cooperation at a time when such institutions are increasingly questioned.

In “Two Spiritual Masters: St. John of the Cross and Nyoshul Khenpo,” James Wiseman brings together the sixteenth-century Carmelite mystic and the twentieth-century Tibetan Dzogchen master as kindred spirits. He frames the comparison within the dialogical vision of *Nostra Aetate* and Bede Griffiths’s notion of a “common wisdom.” After brief accounts of each man’s life, Wiseman compares their teachings on the ultimate goal of human life: union with God for John, and the realization of the “natural Great Perfection” for Nyoshul. Each, he shows, speaks of that goal in apophatic terms. He then traces parallels in the paths each prescribed, including detachment, the movement from discursive meditation to restful awareness, solitude, humility, and love. While acknowledging real doctrinal differences, the article presents the two as companions in contemplative practice.

In “Interfaith Transposed: Interfaithlessness in the Age of Religious Exit,” Kristen Tobey examines “interfaithless” initiatives in the United States, in which people who have left different high-demand religious groups come together as they navigate religious exit. Drawing on surveys and interviews, Tobey focuses on the Interfaithless Beach Party, held in Southern California between 2014 and 2022, where former Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Orthodox Jews, Scientologists, and others built community through shared food, humor, and stories of estrangement and recovery. Rather than placing such gatherings at the margins of the interfaith movement, Tobey borrows the musical idea of transposition: interfaithlessness, she argues, is interfaith encounter played in a different key. The article challenges assumptions that the growing nonreligious population

is hostile to religion and invites interfaith practitioners and scholars to take “exes” seriously as partners in interreligious exchange.

In “‘Creating Commonplaces’: Value Generalization in the *A Common Word* Dialogue between Islam and Christianity,” Benedict Coleridge argues that democratic theory has much to learn from interfaith dialogue. Against Jürgen Habermas’s search for a shared “normative grammar” underlying pluralist deliberation, Coleridge pairs Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics with Hans Joas’s account of “value generalization.” Together, he argues, they show how traditions can clarify their ethical meanings and develop new shared values through critical encounter rather than formal abstraction. His case study is the *A Common Word* initiative, launched in 2007 by 138 Muslim scholars in the wake of Pope Benedict XVI’s Regensburg lecture. Coleridge reads the scriptural exchange that followed as a “conceptual laboratory” in which ethical commitments grew across difference. The article offers a model of intercultural deliberation that honors particularity while cultivating common ground.

These six articles are followed by two scholarly reflections.

In “The Compassion of Rowan Williams: Lessons for Interfaith Dialogue,” Akbar Ahmed, Frankie Martin, and Amineh Hoti look at how the former Archbishop of Canterbury has approached the religious “Other.” They draw on their personal interviews with Williams and on his wider body of work. The authors, two of whom are Muslim scholars who have known Williams for years, trace several core themes in his thought. Interfaith dialogue, for Williams, should be framed within an awareness of a larger unity. Each tradition receives only a partial understanding of the divine. Identity is formed through encounter with others, and a pluralist political society should be imagined as a “covenant” among diverse communities. The article also sets out Williams’s practical steps for dialogue and argues that his compassionate, hopeful approach offers lessons well beyond Christianity.

In “Toumliline’s Experiment—Benedictine Monasticism and Interfaith Dialogue in Postcolonial Morocco (1952–1968),” Mohammed Lazrak recovers the history of a small Benedictine monastery in the Middle Atlas that has received little attention. Its monks refused to see themselves as “pastors” or “chaplains.” Instead, they chose to be “men of prayer” living among their Muslim and Amazigh neighbors. Drawing on site plaques, archival sources, and his own 2025 fieldwork, Lazrak traces how the community learned Arabic and Berber, ran a dispensary and boarding school, and hosted the *Rencontres Internationales*. These gatherings, held under royal patronage and attended by Louis Massignon and Emmanuel

Levinas, anticipated the spirit of Vatican II. Reading this legacy through the Qur’anic ideal of *ta’aruf* (Q 49:13), the article proposes a model of “incarnational dialogue,” in which religious encounter rests on shared life and material solidarity rather than theological exchange.

The issue closes with one book review: Paul Hedges reviews *The Habits of Race and Faith in a Religiously Diverse World*, by Mara Brecht.

This issue would not have come together without the proficient and superb work of Lydia Bremer-McCollum (Assistant Editor), Sze-Long A. Wong (Design and Production Editor), Mark Spinnenweber (Graduate Research Fellow), and Aubrey Chavez (Social Media and Website Manager). My sincere gratitude is extended to all of them.

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