

*The Ocean of God: On the Transreligious Future of Religions.* By Roland Faber. London: Anthem Press, 2019. 262 pp. ISBN: 978-1-783-08985-7. \$125.00, hardback; \$40.00, eBook.

Roland Faber, Professor at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University, is a central voice of process theology's current generation, carrying forward the work of Whitehead, Hartshorne, Cobb, Griffin, and others. Faber has authored previous texts on process theory and theology, including *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies* (Westminster John Knox, 2004); *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement* (Cascade, 2008); and *The Garden of Reality: Transreligious Relativity in a World of Becoming* (Lexington, 2018). These titles bear mentioning as they are an anteroom for *The Ocean of God*, which is the novel, evolutionary "becoming" of Faber's previous works.

Faber's thoughtful treatment of "religions"—a word problematic for its sense of immutability—moves through and beyond the well-trod categories of inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism, and mysticism as components for a transreligious program. In the first section of *The Ocean of God*, Faber progresses through these categories to his central thesis, an *apophatic-polyphilic pluralism* with four propositions: "there must always be *many* religions . . . [because there exist] ever-new experiences of divine infusion and compassion"; "there must always be *new* religions" because "neither God's [another problematically reductive term] creative engagement with the world nor the ways of experiencing God ever exhaust themselves"; religious possibility, therefore the history of religion(s), exists without end, "as God's polyphilia always loves our responses and transforms the past . . . into new potentials for an unprecedented future"; and the divine/ultimate reality is *active* in the ongoing process of religious becoming (65). Throughout Faber masterfully uplifts Baha'i philosophy and theology as an expression of this apophatic-polyphilic pluralism.

The second section turns to negotiating apophatic-polyphilic pluralism, unpacking "transformations of opposites into contrasts" (an echo of Cantwell Smith) "in which Reality begins to become transparent" (90). Faber offers a vision of horizontal and vertical pluralism to express the "meaning of the unity of religions as one of a multiplicity in the light of the divine manifold" (207). The text offers examples of attempts toward proto-polyphilic pluralism, from the fifteenth-century mystic Nicolas of Cusa to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions to the experiment of Green Acre, a series of annual retreats initiated by Sarah Farmer (d. 1916), "a scholar of world religions and a crusader of peace" (greenacre.org). The Green Acre experiments were built around non-triumphalist, transreligious discourse with some of the greatest religious thinkers of the time. Through these experiences, Farmer came to appreciate, and eventually become, Baha'i. Today, she is little known outside Baha'i circles; the story of her establishment of Green Acres and personal spiritual search commend her to wider, deserved attention.

If we are successful in negotiating some of the "how" of polyphilic pluralism, Part Three of Faber's work, "Transreligious Religious Horizons," reads like a Big Bang from the intricacies of the earlier chapters. Faber situates us globally, even cosmically, exploring a vision for how apophatic-polyphilic pluralism interfaces with transreligious discourse in its broadest sense. Faber turns toward not only the global human family but our relationship to the globe itself: "we must think of religions as a human phenomenon and of humanity in its ecological integration with this earth" (131). As for the discourse:

A new agenda for religious existence in the future becomes available: *spiritually to become expressions of the apophatic-polyphilic oscillations of Reality in the experiences of ever new forms of creative living together and without the need for antagonisms and mutual exclusions* (135).

Apophatic-polyphilic pluralism shows myriad ways to answer Whitehead's resonant question, "Must religion always be a synonym for hatred?" with an affirmative "No." Faber proposes a way forward for peace among peoples on a planet for which we care responsibly, with an ultimate reality that invites (never demands) the unfolding of our best selves. The sweep of Faber's program leaves one, frankly, optimistic.

*The Ocean of God* includes a glossary where Faber offers additional intricacies; terminology is less defined than nuanced and interwoven. The bibliography is worth examination on its own. As throughout the book, one will encounter the luminaries of interreligious and comparative theology (Knitter, Clooney, Cornille, Hick, Panikkar, Schmidt-Leukel and others) put into conversation at a table hosted by process theology.

One reviewer of Faber's earlier work wrote that Faber is not "for the amateur" nor the "faint of heart." Faber's prose demands attention and patience, but the reader is treated less to "reading a book" than to stepping into *an experience of process theology*. To understand *The Ocean of God* stylistically, Faber's essay "My Faith in Baha'u'llah: A Declaration" is helpful. There, he writes, "As I think, I don't think: that is, analyze, compare or reckon. I let become . . . Thought is mystical—as it roams through inner reality and the unfathomable, I wait for the spirit to sink into my heart. Thought is prophetic—it invites the unexpected, the not yet" (*Baha'i Studies Review* 20 [2014]: 152.) With this in mind, the reader is better able to be present to the unfolding of this text. Not only does his "Declaration" illuminate Faber's approach to thinking, but importantly, it helps to contextualize *The Ocean of God* as a high-level contribution to Baha'i thought.

Harvard Divinity School's Jon Levenson has written extensively about the problematic nature of the term "Abrahamic" (which Faber employs, Levenson raising similar issues to Faber's concerns about "God" and "religion"). A "conversation" between *The Ocean of God* and Levenson's *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2012) would be fruitful. The understandable privileging of Baha'i, for Faber an exemplar of transreligious process developed in *The Ocean of God*, and further "dialogue" between apophatic-polyphilic pluralism and Renewal Judaism's emerging concept of Deep Ecumenism, could add to some practical matters of liturgy and worship, as well as additional modalities of relationship between religions and "God talk."

Audiences for *The Ocean of God* include scholars of the Baha'i tradition, who will find a gratifying, detailed treatment of Baha'i in deep conversation with Faberian process theology. Process theologians will delight, I believe, in process theology coming alive as both a local and cosmic becoming. The general reader will benefit from first exploring process thought and theology, which, while unpacked some here, requires tenacity of the uninitiated in either Baha'i or process thought. I was just such a novice reader in process theology; this text required meaningful preparation. I was richly rewarded for the effort. Just as Faber found Baha'i to be a kind of coming-home to a place he had never left, so I found this text: it opened the world of process theology in which I could delight because I found I was at home all along.

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