

The Journal of Interreligious Studies

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We remain grateful to Dr. Stephanie Varnon-Hughes and Rabbi Joshua M. Z. Stanton for their vision and commitment to interreligious engagement by founding the Journal under its original title, the Journal of Interreligious Dialogue, in 2009.

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From the Editor-in-Chief

The last ten months have been hectic and difficult for many of our readers across not only North America but also the world. The global pandemic and the subsequent economic and political responses to it have produced uncertainty and hardship for many. The most vulnerable have been suffering the most, and even those in relatively privileged situations have been experiencing precarity. It may seem jarring to continue with business as usual: teaching, researching, writing, editing, publishing, organizing and attending conferences, and so on. However, the hope is that in these actions education may function as an act of resistance, liberation, and freedom. In any case, respite from anxiety often results from performing routines. Religious communities have often expressed as much in their recurring rituals that bring a sense of order and harmony to the otherwise frenetic world around us.

Events and Updates

Before introducing this issue, I wish to share various items of good news marking the growth and expansion of the *JIRS*: **a celebratory event, a published volume, and a new podcast.**

On Monday, November 30, at 1 p.m. (via Zoom) the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* is commemorating its belated 10-year anniversary; it will take place in conjunction with the virtual conference of the American Academy of Religion. The *JIRS* will join with the Association of Interreligious/Interfaith Studies (AIIS) to celebrate the publication of *Deep Understanding for Divisive Times: Essays Marking a Decade of the Journal of Interreligious Studies*, edited by Lucinda Mosher, Axel Takács, Or Rose, and Mary Elizabeth Moore. This volume offers original essays by scholars, activists, and educators who specialize in interreligious/interfaith studies and grassroots efforts. We will also be celebrating the release of the first episode of our new podcast, *Inter/Sections*, produced in partnership with Seton Hall University's Institute for Communication and Religion. I hope you will join editors past and present, along with contributors to this new volume and podcast, for a conversation about engaging interreligiously in a time of upheaval. Details and announcements will be circulated via the website, our mailing list, and social media accounts in due time.

In This Issue

The editorial and publishing teams are fortunate enough to have received a strong collection of rolling submissions even during these trying times. Six articles and five book reviews comprise this issue.

In "Graduate Teaching in Indonesia as a Means of Interreligious Engagement," Leonard Chrysostomos Epafras and Alan Brill explore the lessons learned from an interreligious educational endeavor in Indonesia. The Centre for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies at the Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta invited Dr. Brill, a professor of Jewish-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University, to teach together with Dr. Epafras from the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies. The aim was to bring a Jewish professor to lecture about the Jewish traditions to Muslim students in Islamic colleges as an exercise in interfaith education. Many parts of the world, including certain diverse regions of the United States, are becoming more and more pluralistic; but this paper reminds us that bringing a representative of a religion for direct contact with people in another country (or in a homogenous region of an otherwise diverse nation)

retains its importance in contexts of little prior exposure to practitioners of a minority religion. In this case, Muslim students learning about Judaism from a Jewish professor, as passé as that might sound to certain quarters of interreligious pedagogy, when executed well, remains a transformative experience for all involved. Dr. Brill and Dr. Epafra remind us that this type of interfaith learning retains its power to effect positive changes in assumptions regarding the religious or cultural other.

Asha Shipman is the Director of Hindu Life and Hindu Chaplain for Yale University. In “Hindu Chaplaincy in Higher Education,” Dr. Shipman explores the contours of Hindu chaplaincy in US higher education and draws from the programming she offers at Yale to demonstrate the importance of multireligious chaplaincies in universities. In general, the support offered by a Hindu chaplain, particularly when it contextualizes and affirms the faith tradition, improves students’ sense of well-being and can insulate them from anxiety and depression. Dr. Shipman’s paper, in my view, is a strong argument for institutions of higher learning to dedicate resources toward the expansion of their chaplaincies or offices of religious and spiritual life.

Matthew Maruggi, in “Disorienting Solidarity: Engaging in Difference and Developing ‘Fluidarity,’” offers an interreligious exploration of the various theories and practices of solidarity. Dr. Maruggi suggests that the practice of solidarity in a globalized world often implies the privileged few setting the agenda for the marginalized many. The article underscores how so-called solidarity can easily slip into hegemony. Over and against this nominal solidarity he explores the notion of “fluidarity,” which is an attitude and practice that embraces the complexity of engaging the other in a pluralized, diverse, and always changing struggle. Fluidarity demands a disorientation of monolithic conceptions of truth that results from the embodied encounter with *real* difference; it refuses, in a way, the subsumption of the marginalized into the privileged whole. During these times of increasing inequalities and inequities, adopting fluidarity is a necessary antidote to the hegemony of dominant social and religious groups.

“Types of Interreligious Dialogue,” by Sergey Melnik, is a contribution to the ongoing analysis, framing, and categorizing of various expressions of interreligious dialogue. The intentional practice of bringing diverse religious communities together is not monolithic; each context is different from the next. While there has been a proliferation of typologies of interreligious dialogue, additional analysis is helpful because no single typology is comprehensive in either breadth or depth. These second-order analyses of interreligious dialogue provide meaningful nuance. But perhaps more importantly, it may be that these theoretical descriptions could benefit communities and organizations who are planning events for interreligious dialogue. It is my hope that, by continuing to publish these analyses and typologies, theory may inform praxis; that is, interfaith and interreligious organizations may have additional resources that aid in their planning and strategies around dialogue events.

Rachelle Seyd, in “Come, O Comet! Build a Bridge of Fire Across Darkness!,” proffers a theological reflection on the Bhakti-Mysticism of Kazi Nazrul Islam (d. 1976), a Bengali poet and political activist who occupied a liminal spiritual space between and within the Islamic and Hindu traditions. The paper explores Nazrul’s spiritual and political orientation and contends that such liminality offers a meaningful contribution to the contemporary study of religion and interreligious engagement, interchange, and dialogue. In my view, Seyd’s contribution to the discussion of multiple spiritual belonging through Nazrul’s case is a necessary corrective to the

assumptions that are often made regarding mysticism. That is, some assume that figures or beliefs that attempt to bring disparate religions together through spirituality, mysticism, or devotional poetry end up ignoring political, embodied differences in search of an all-encompassing (often hegemonic) homogeneity (this, perhaps, is the charge levied against *religio perennis*). But Nazrul was both poet and political activist, both deeply spiritual and political, and Syed suggests that his liminality provides insights into this sort of interreligious engagement.

In the final essay, “Comparative Theology as Liberal Art,” Bin Song challenges dominant expressions of comparative theology; these expressions begin from the medieval Christian definition of theology as “faith seeking understanding.” Instead, this paper endeavors to understand comparative theology through Aristotle’s theology rather than the theology of Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, and so on. Dr. Song investigates Aristotle’s theology as integral to philosophy as a way of life in ancient Greek thought. This resituates comparative theology as a liberal art rather than as a strictly Christian discipline, and thus provides theoretical and methodological space for non-Christian perspectives such as Ruism (Confucianism). It seems Dr. Song’s piece, in my view, also opens up the possibility for comparative theology, also known as interreligious or intercultural theology, to be included in various liberal arts or humanities curricula at public, private, confessional, and non-confessional institutions of higher learning.

The issue closes with five book reviews.

- J. Cody Nielson reviews Khyati Y. Joshi's *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America* (2020).
- Fung Kei Cheng reviews Paul Knitter’s *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (2013).
- Our Senior Editor, Lucinda Allen Mosher, reviews Dan Cohn-Sherbok’s, George D. Chryssides’, and Usama Hasan’s *People of the Book: An Interfaith Dialogue about How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Understand Their Sacred Scriptures* (2019).
- Mosher also reviews *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches from an Emerging Field*, edited by Hans Gustafson (2020).
- And finally, Mosher reviews Celene Ibrahim’s *One Nation, Indivisible: Seeking Liberty and Justice from the Pulpit to the Streets* (2019).

Thank you for your continued support and interest in the *Journal of Interreligious Studies*. Enjoy this issue!

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