

Critical Perspectives on Interreligious Education: Experiments in Empathy.
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Critical Perspectives on Interreligious Education: Experiments in Empathy, edited by Najeeba Syeed and Heidi Hadsell as a title in the Brill series, “Currents of Encounter: Studies in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations,” is a critical addition to existing literature in interreligious teaching and learning. Comprising a collection of articles written by established scholars and emergent voices, these authors reflect on some of the pioneer programs in interreligious studies in theological education, as well as address critical challenges, such as white supremacy, colonialism, and gender issues. Judith A. Berling’s perceptive introduction locates the essays within the field and raises key areas of inquiry, including overcoming monotheistic exclusivism; realities of complex and hybrid religious identities; Muslim perspectives; interreligious learning as co-formation; the changing shape of religious activity; and, curricula issues such as assessment, outcomes, and sustainability. Despite the many challenges in interreligious education, particularly given the fragility of many theological schools today, Berling asserts the “promise and vitality of interreligious education” going forward, with the articles in this volume as part of that creative energy.

Eleven chapters present compelling and innovative ideas and strategies related to interreligious teaching and learning. The riches and insights of these nuanced and in-depth essays cannot be adequately addressed in this brief review. The authors are known for their innovative program development and contributions to the field of interreligious teaching and learning, for some, for a generation. The diversity of voices represented—Jewish, Christian, Muslim, hybrid, with further diversities therein, opens the conversation on interreligious teaching and learning to much needed intersectional perspectives.

In chapter one, Monica Coleman explores African American religious pluralism, and examines the tools and gifts of this religious experience in terms of culture and politics. Reuven Firestone, in chapter two, interrogates the “monotheist imperative” within seminary education and argues for the need to transcend the limits of religious institutions for interreligious learning to occur. The intersection of interreligious and intercultural pedagogies and the challenges of white supremacy to mutual formation in the classroom is the focus of Christine J. Hong’s essay in chapter three. Munir Jiwa’s article in chapter four offers a reflective overview of some of the challenges and opportunities for dialogue within Islamic studies in theological schools.

In chapter five, Nancy Fuchs Kreimer reflects on two bold initiatives of Reconstructionist Rabbinical College; one which builds solidarity between Jews and Muslims, and another which focuses on interreligious literacy and co-spiritual formation across traditions. John Thatamanil’s essay in chapter six offers his perspectives on comparative theology as a quest for interreligious wisdom. A comparison of the development of the women’s movement in the United States with that of interreligious studies, grounded in her experience with Chicago Theological Seminary, is the focus of chapter seven by Rachel S. Mikva, Timur Yuskaev writes of the impact of pluralistic spaces for students in the Muslim chaplaincy program at Hartford Seminary in chapter eight. Tony Richie offers an Evangelical/Pentecostal pedagogy for teaching interfaith topics in chapter nine. In chapter ten, Jennifer Howe Peace argues for the importance of moving from a model of formation to a model of “coformation” as integral to interreligious competency. The relationship

between the theological educator and the student as an interreligious ally is the focus of chapter eleven by Scott C. Alexander.

In her conclusion to the volume, Heidi Hadsell highlights the collaborative process which brought the book to fruition, including face-to-face meetings and many conversations. The commitment of the authors and the creative energy behind the project is palpable in the essays. “The work of these authors supports the efforts of those who build bridges in order to understand another religious worldview, engage with the people who inhabit that worldview, and also welcome the light that journey shines on their own tradition and self-understanding,” writes Hadsell (242). Overall, the essays are scholarly and written in an accessible manner. The book is important for specialists and students in interreligious studies and comparative theologies, as well as those who are interested in the shape of theological education today. Religious leaders and educators will also find the content of this book insightful. As the field of interreligious education continues to grow and expand, these articles will serve as dynamic conversation partners.

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