

The Journal of Interreligious Studies

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**Issue 40
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From the Editor-in-Chief

Axel M. Oaks Takacs



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I write this introduction a little over two weeks after the most recent Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Antonio. Scholars of religion, theologians, and practitioners gathered to share and discuss their research and ideas in all sorts of fields related to the study of religion and theology. The Association for Interreligious / Interfaith Studies (aiistudies.org) gathered for a series of events on Friday, during which we learned about the interfaith campus programming at the University of Incarnate Word. They also hosted a social gathering in which we discussed recent publications in the field, especially *With the Best of Intentions: Interreligious Missteps and Mistakes* (Orbis Books), edited by Lucinda Mosher, Elinor J. Pierce and Or N. Rose. At the AAR, the Interreligious/Interfaith Studies Unit, Comparative Theology Unit, and several others hosted panels related to the field of interreligious studies and of interest to interreligious studies scholars. Overall, it was a hectic but intellectually stimulating and socially refreshing gathering.

I am delighted to have managed and edited the publication of another collection of rolling submissions. Issue 40 contains seven essays, five book reviews, and one book review essay. As the calendar year comes to a close, I am sure many of our readers are busy with end-of-semester duties—marking exams, grading essays, and so forth. Perhaps this issue will provide some of you a break from those duties to explore topics of interest.

Cosmas Ebo Sarbah opens us up with an article entitled, “Fante Marriage, Kinship, Hospitality, and Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana,” in which he discusses, specifically, marriage-based kinship (also called affinal kinship) and its implication for Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. In this article, Sarbah explores how the values of hospitality among the Fante people—who are both Muslim and Christian—are often more formative of Christian-Muslim marriages than the religious values and faith commitments themselves. In this case—and putting it too simply—indigenous values bring together disparate religious communities.

In “The Practice of Religious Politics in Plural Societies: A Perspective of Jürgen Habermas’s Theory of the Public Sphere on the Dynamics of Democracy in Salatiga City, Indonesia,” co-authors Yusak B. Setyawan and Robert Siagian explore the formative impact of

religion in the public sphere and on the maintenance of democratic governance. The religious pluralism and multi-ethnic population that make up the social world of Salatiga City sustain a democratic system. They then suggest that, perhaps, there are lessons to be learned for other contexts.

Patricia Guernelli Palazzo Tsai analyzes the process of inclusion of social outcasts in Buddhist communities of ancient India in “From Outcast to Arhat: A Discussion of Human Dignity in the Buddhist Jātaka.” More specifically, Palazzo Tsai explores the story of Losaka, who was an outcast subject to no rights and no voice but welcomed into a Buddhist community in a way that offered support and brought back his dignity as a human being. Her essay contributes to understanding the social changes that Buddhadharma brought to India. However, it also seeks to employ Buddhist theories to address and respond to exclusionary social structures today.

“Devotional Detachment: The Islamic Virtue of Zuhd & Rūpa Gosvāmī’s Upadeśāmṛta,” is an exercise in comparative religious ethics by David Coolidge focusing on ascetism and renunciation. In bringing together a classical Islamic text with a text from the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition in Sanskrit, Coolidge seeks to articulate a mode of ethical reasoning that is both rooted in profound respect for pre-colonial ethical traditions, and also cognizant of the troubling realities of twenty-first century human life.

The last two essays were part of a panel in the Comparative Theology Unit of the 2022 Annual Meeting of the AAR that explored the intersection of political theology and comparative theology. In “Worldly Saint, Political Saint: Revisiting the Christian Notion of Holiness,” Hans A. Harmakaputra utilizes a comparative lens to draw insights from Muslim and Christian perspectives on saints and sainthood to underscore the at times deeply political nature of holiness—or sanctity—in these traditions. This is in contradiction to the more popular, Christian notion of sainthood that often describes it as passive, apolitical, and purely spiritual.

Joseph Kimmel, in “‘What is Your Name?’: Names Comparatively Compelled in Christian and Buddhist Texts,” applies Louis Althusser’s interpellation theory to an examination of the exorcistic battle between Legion and Jesus in Mark 5 and a tenth-century collection of spells featuring the Buddhist deity Bhṛkuṭī. Kimmel seeks to demonstrate why and how onomastic obtainment plays such a powerful role, viz., how obtaining and wielding another’s name effectively interpellates the other, securing that figure (that is, Legion, Bhṛkuṭī) within an ideology of relative weakness vis-à-vis the speaker.

The respondent to that 2022 AAR panel was JIRS Senior Editor Lucinda Mosher. Her remarks as they pertained to Harmakaputra and Kimmel are included in this issue as a short essay entitled, “The Political Implications of Comparative Theology: A Response to an American Academy of Religion Panel Presentation.”

These articles are followed by five book reviews.

- Regan Hardeman reviews *The Secular Paradox: On the Religiosity of the Non-Religious*, by Joseph Blankholm.

- Rebekah Neuberger reviews *Sonorous Desert: What Deep Listening Taught Early Christian Monks—and What It Can Teach Us*, by Kim Haines-Eitzen.
- Hussein Rashid reviews *Queer Companions: Religion, Public Intimacy, and Sainly Effects in Pakistan*, by Omar Kasmani.
- Abel Aruan reviews *Indonesian Pluralities: Islam, Citizenship, and Democracy*, by Robert W. Hefner and Zainal Abidin Bagir.
- David D. Grafton reviews *Shi'ite Rulers, Sunni Rivals, and Christians in Between: Muslim-Christian Relations in Fāṭimid Palestine and Egypt*, by Stephen Gertz.

The issue closes with a book review essay by Robert McDonald, who engages *Reclaiming Stolen Earth: An Africana Ecotheology*, by Jawanza Eric Clark.

I hope you enjoy the various articles and book reviews in this issue. We have many more lined up for 2024 and look forward to your continued interest.

Gratitude

This issue would not have come together without the exceptional work of Lucinda Mosher (Senior Editor) and Joshua Neuberger (Research Fellow).

Axel M. Oaks Takacs, Th.D.
Editor-in-Chief
Journal of Interreligious Studies

