The Journal of Inter-Religious Studies
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Dear partners in dialogue,

This issue represents some of the rich scholarship and dialogue that were fostered at the recent meeting of the American Academy of Religions (AAR), in San Diego, California, in November 2014. The Academy includes groups including Interreligious and Interfaith Studies Group and Comparative Theology, and papers and panels within these groups provide opportunities for learning, conversation, and collaboration for participants from around the world.

Part of the mission of *The Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* is to amplify—as widely as possible—the work of scholars and participants in these fields. By including papers presented at the AAR, we make this work accessible to our readers around the world, in a free and online format, to include as many dialogue partners as possible—even those who could not gather in person in San Diego.

This issue begins with an intentional conversation regarding this emerging field, including teachers and practitioners engaged in inter-religious teaching and learning. Cassie Meyer, Eboo Patel, Jennifer Peace, Jeanine Diller, and Colleen Windham-Hughes thoughtfully explore what it means to "do interfaith work" on their campuses, and provide glimpses of how they teach and reflect on their own practice in this field.

Then, in "Perspectives from Sociology: Modeling Religious Pluralism from Inward and Outward," Karsten Lehmann and Anne Koch interrogate sociological approaches to inter-religious dialogue. Their conversation partner on the panel, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, considers the current state of the field in, "Religion and Peacebuilding: Reflections on Current Challenges and Future Prospects."

From the panel on inter-religious aesthetics, we share three papers and additional material from a fourth participant. Michelle Voss Roberts's paper will be included in her forthcoming book on the same topic. In "Ritual Preparation for Artistic Production: The Spiritual Aesthetics of Spiritual Ascetics in the Abrahamic Faiths," Peter Schadler explores the spiritual preparation artisans in Abrahamic faiths undertake. In "Seeing the things you cannot see: (Dis)-solving the sublime in interreligious aesthetics through the paintings of Hiroshi Senju," Peter L. Doebler provides a focused study of a series of paintings that are situated together in an installation, and queries them for ways to explore inter-religious dialogue. Doebler's paper is accompanied by photographs of the artwork. Finally, in Learning to Listen: Reflections on Interreligious Aesthetics," William Dyrness models a way of listening for and wondering about ways aesthetic endeavors can foster or facilitate inter-religious dialogue.

Then, we hear from participants from a panel convened to explore inter-religious responses to climate change. Anthony J. Watson provides, "Opening Remarks for "Interreligious Responses to Climate Change" followed by Ian Mevorach's comparative

exploration, "Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Ecological Crisis: Negotiating Ideological Obstacles to Common Ground. Then, in "Catholic Common Good, Buddhist Interdependence, and the Practice of Interreligious Ecological Ethics," Daniel P. Scheid draws upon the work of key theologians in his field to articulate a concrete, interreligious, ecological ethic. Pim Valkenberg responds to and sums the conversation of his partners in, "Interreligious Responses to Climate Change: Some Suggestions."

In addition, in our interViews section on the website, where we share examples of innovative practice and voices from the field, we are honored to share "Holi Toledo," by Jeanine Diller and Ibtissam Gad, which captures and articulates how one campus community engages sustaining, fun, and inclusive inter-religious learning. Ahmed Albanai has provided images from the community's event.

Finally, we close with an interview of dialogue pioneer Leonard Swidler, by Or Rose. In this conversation, Swidler reflects on his life and work, and offers reflections for current and emerging leaders in this field.

Thank you again for reading, sharing, and working with your communities to build lasting and compelling engagement. The momentum and growth of these fields speaks, we think, to the deep human need we have to both tell our own stories, and hear the stories of others. May this issue be one small part of that larger shared endeavor.

Yours in peace,
Kendra and Stephanie

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The *Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* is pleased to be a program of the Center for Inter-Religious and Communal Leadership Education (CIRCLE), a joint initiative of Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College.

Table of Contents, *JIRS* Issue 16

Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies: Emerging Questions and Considerations
Contributors: Jeanine Diller, Eboo Patel, Jennifer Peace, Colleen Windham-Hughes

Over the past several years, a robust conversation about the role of interfaith and interreligious engagement and the academic study of religion has emerged at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the major gathering of religious studies and theology scholars in the United States. Since the 2013 Annual Meeting, the addition of a new group focusing on Interreligious and Interfaith Studies at Annual Meeting has helped foster dialogue and scholarship within this emerging field as well as connect scholars from diverse corners of religious studies and theologies.

We[1] organized this roundtable conversation, "Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies: Emerging Questions and Consideration," at the 2014 AAR Annual Meeting in order to explore several theoretical questions raised by the emergence of this area of study as well as the practical implications of these questions. The conversation engaged scholars from diverse institutions (a public university, a theological school, and a private, religiously-affiliated liberal arts university, and the leader of a national non-profit focused on interfaith and higher education); in the conversation we sought to explore the following questions:

- What should the field of interreligious and interfaith studies look like? What can we say about the research agenda, signature pedagogies, and learning outcomes that might emerge from this work?
- Is this field interdisciplinary, and if so, what other disciplines might play a role in shaping the field? What does that mean for scholars of religion?
- What posture should religious studies take to this emerging field? How is interreligious and interfaith studies different from or similar to already existing subfields in religious studies, such as comparative religions or comparative theology?

What follows is based on the comments that the four panelists gave for our roundtable discussion; their comments were followed by a lively conversation with the audience.

Eboo Patel

A few years ago, the senior staff at Interfaith Youth (the folks who do most of the hiring at the organization) started noticing a sharp increase in the number of applicants saying that they had taken "interfaith courses" as undergraduates. We were thrilled by this

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[1] This panel coordination also included the work of Cassie Meyer, Faculty Partnerships Consultant, Interfaith Youth Core.

development. Unlike organizations in more established fields like education and health care, we found it difficult to hire people with the specific knowledge-base and skill set we needed. "Ramp up" time at IFYC was typically long as new staff learned the various intricacies of bridge-building between people who orient around religion differently, and the ramp itself was steep. So naturally, learning that courses were emerging that would prepare students for our area of work was very exciting to us.

As we started digging deeper into this new crop of applicants, we came to a startling realization. No two of the applicants claiming "interfaith coursework" on their resume seemed to have learned or done the same thing. Interfaith for one applicant was a course on personal spiritual journeys, for another it was about violence in the Middle East and for a third it was about Catholicism's relationship with other religions. The reading lists had little in common, even the way "interfaith" was defined varied widely.

Part of the work we do at Interfaith Youth Core is visit campuses, which gave us the opportunity to ask faculty and administrators questions about the observations noted above. We learned that interfaith had become "a thing" on campuses, including in the curriculum. This seemed to be the case for three often overlapping reasons: campuses themselves had become increasingly religiously diverse; students were increasingly interested in exploring issues of personal spirituality but not studying "traditional religion;" and religion was all over the evening news (often in ugly ways) and colleges felt they had a civic and educational duty to engage the contemporary manifestations of religion. Interfaith wound up being a catch-all term to engage these three distinct but related dynamics, often in distinct and unrelated ways.

A conversation started bubbling up amidst our internal team and our broader network on college campuses: what ought it mean when the term 'interfaith' shows up in the course catalogue? If you graduate with a sociology major, it probably means that you have read Marx, Weber and Durkheim, and that you know something about quantitative and qualitative research methods. If you graduate with a nursing degree, there are certain things that hospitals that hire nurses expect you are able to do.

Is there a knowledge-base and a skill-set that we should expect graduates of interfaith courses to have? Is there a canon in this field? Is it even a field, meaning, is there an animal called 'interfaith studies' that is distinct from, say, comparative religions or religious studies? As minors and concentrations in interfaith studies emerge, what promises are the creators of such academic programs making to the outside world, implicitly at least? That the State Department should hire them because they are ready to do conflict resolution in places like Belfast or Baghdad?

The purpose of this panel at the American Academy of Religion is to put the larger issue about the definition of "interfaith studies" to a set of faculty members experienced in teaching interfaith courses and currently working on designing more ambitious interfaith

curricular programs like minors and concentrations. We thought we would get into the conversation by asking them the following questions:

- What are the transformational moments in your own life/work that got you thinking about interfaith studies? What does your interfaith studies work look like now?
- What are the tensions that we experience and how do we make those productive?
- What is the historical moment that we're in currently (and where has the interfaith field been previously), so that interfaith/interreligious studies is something that's emerging now?

Jeanine Diller

I came to the field of interfaith studies at a conference in the spring of 2007. By this time, I had been steeped for years in analytic philosophy of religion, had developed an alternative to the reigning idea of God as perfect, and had co-organized this conference to explore some other alternative ideas of God I had come across along the way. As the proceedings were coming to a close, there was a consensus that our discussion, though interesting, had been focused too narrowly on Christian views of God, and that it was no good to go on ignoring other religions' views since they were squarely germane. There were nods all around, and a nod within me, so much so that when Asa Kasher and I decided to convert the work of the conference into a book, we heeded the attendees and set out to collect essays from across the spectrum of religious and philosophical ideas of God and – now that the work was opening up – other ultimate realities.

During the five years that the book was growing, so was my interfaith awareness. I got regular glimpses of religious landscapes entirely different from my own. I interacted with experts from a multitude of traditions about the object of religious concern at the heart of these traditions. I was also hired during this period into my current position at the University of Toledo, which threw me into a sort of academic interfaith trifecta – adding teaching and service on interfaith issues to my research on them. Among my responsibilities then and now is serving as the Director of our University's Center for Religious Understanding – an extracurricular arm that promotes a deeper understanding of religion on campus, in the community and beyond. We run public lectures, small interfaith dialogues, an after-school interfaith service learning project, occasional TV interviews, and (new last year) an all-campus interfaith immersion called "Holi Toledo."

I see now that my own development in interfaith work has been happening alongside the development of a new academic field within it. The new field is nascent enough that Eboo asks above: "Is it even a field...?" I answer, "Yes." Eboo offers us the following helpful definition:

"Interfaith studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines the multiple dimensions of how individuals and groups who orient around religion differently interact

with one another, and the implications of these interactions for communities, civil society and global politics."[2]

This gloss and a glance at the American Academy of Religion's program units together suggest it would be natural to frame interfaith studies as a subfield of religious studies. Most of the subfields on AAR's unit list are distinguished by either (1) focus on a topic, sometimes a particular religion (e.g., Buddhism, the Study of Islam) and sometimes not (Women and Religion) or (2) use of a methodological approach (e.g., Philosophy of Religion, Religion and the Social Sciences). The subfield of interfaith studies would (1) focus not on a particular tradition but on how the stuff of multiple traditions interact and (2) do so using many disciplinary approaches germane to this topic, each of which could distinguish different sub-subfields. For example, a colleague of mine working on the epistemology of religious disagreement might be doing philosophy of interreligion while another colleague working on how Muslims are framed in Western media sources might be adding to the subfield of interreligious mass communication. Someone tracing the development of religious categories in south Asia during British colonial rule might be doing interreligious history, and a project in interreligious psychology might identify the range of affective reactions people experience to religious others and the psychological bases for and results of such reactions. In addition, in the same way that feminist studies is a subfield of women's studies with expertise in identifying arguments and political strategies for advancing the cause of feminism, so also pluralist studies could be a subfield of interreligious studies with similar expertise for advancing the cause of pluralism (in Diana Eck's sense of positive engagement with diversity). Thus, a major field of "religious studies," a subfield "interreligious studies," and sub-subfields such as pluralist studies, philosophy of interreligion, interreligious history, etc. I advocate using "interreligious" vs. "interfaith" studies, both because "interfaith" does not capture well several perspectives we would want under discussion (e.g., Asian and indigenous) and because "interfaith" can signal assent to an implicit norm of interfaith cooperation about which some parts of the field will be in open-ended inquiry.

The seeds of such a field of interreligious studies have been there for some time, scattered. It would strengthen this existing work to bring it together as a field since this would explicitly acknowledge and promote its interreligious content and help scholars find each other and collaborate.

Someone might ask: but why strengthen this work, why now? Because, to expand on Eboo's thoughts above, religious difference is hitting the world hard now, from Syria and France to New York and Toledo (we had a mosque set on fire in 2012). The role of religion in these events is complicated, and the role of interreligion even more so. But if we use the gifts of our research time to plumb these realities and our classroom time to teach

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[2] Eboo Patel, "Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies," Liberal Education, 9, no. 4 (2013). Accessed March 3, 2015. Available online at http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2013/fall/patel.

what we learn, maybe, just maybe, we and our students can become part of the solution to handling religious difference in our world more carefully and calmly. It's worth building a field to increase our chances.

Jennifer Peace

Taking up Eboo Patel's first pair of questions: "What are the transformational moments in your own life/work that got you thinking about interfaith studies? What does your interfaith studies work look like now?" brings to mind three vignettes. The first is set in 1988 at a house in the English countryside where I went for a Christian youth retreat. Though I had been raised in a Christian family, the brush with the Divine that I experienced on this retreat shaped my adult commitment to Christianity, setting me on a path to seminary and ultimately to my current position at Andover Newton Theological School.[3] So the first point to make is that I come to interfaith studies as a Christian educator in the context of a Christian seminary. Equally significant for my orientation to interfaith studies is the fact that my numinous encounter took place against the backdrop of a diverse, cosmopolitan setting. I was living in London and studying at the School of Oriental and African Studies. SOAS in the 80's boasted a student body of 500 with over 80 nationalities and every possible religious identity represented. My deepening identification with my "religious self" was intimately tied up with my growing understanding of "religious others."

The second vignette comes from my time as a PhD candidate at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkley, CA. Having just finished seminary, where I had been steeped in the stories of my own tradition, I was eager to learn more about the religious worlds of others through a degree in "historical and cultural study of religions." I considered comparative theology but I was less interested in learning what each tradition said about issues of ultimate concern and more interested in learning about the day-to-day experiences and practices of people. I was particularly interested in questions of communal life and civil society – how well or poorly were we doing vis-a-vis our relations across religious lines, and what strategies or models existed to help strengthen and support positive relations? The missing discipline I was looking for then is what I would now call Interfaith Studies – where the focus of study is on the *interactions themselves* – the historical, theological, and actual encounters between individuals who hold diverse religious and ethical commitments.

The third vignette is also set during my time at the GTU where I spent two years as the curriculum coordinator at the *Center for Women and Religions* (CWR). My own feminist consciousness emerged and developed alongside my interreligious understanding. While working at CWR I gained a deeper understanding of the interconnection between various forms of bigotry and oppression as well as an appreciation for education as an essential ingredient in dismantling stereotypes and prejudice. As a result, I am convinced that this

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[3] I write about this experience in, "God is Greater," *My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth and Transformation*, Jennifer Howe Peace, Or Rose and Gregory Mobley, eds. (Orbis: 2012).

emerging field (like Feminist Studies) involves *consciousness-raising work* – requiring both educators and students to examine their own biases and blind spots.

Interfaith Studies is more than an academic enterprise. Religiously-motivated violence, religious bigotry and ignorance about the "religious other" abound and have horrific implications daily as they play out in communities across the globe. Another consequence of my time at CWR is a commitment to scholarship that is accountable to community. Interfaith Studies asks questions about the impact and relevance of scholarship for wider communities - communities to which my students will eventually be accountable.

My orientation to interfaith work is deeply rooted in formative moments like the three vignettes sketched here. I would end with a final observation about the current state of the field. During conversations prompted by our panel, scholar Diana Eck speculated that Interfaith Studies might have a methodology (dialogue and active learning vs. lectures) as well as a focus of study. I see this as a fruitful direction for further reflection. My time at CWR underscored the importance of designing pedagogies consonant with the subject matter. So for example, we followed a shared learning community-model rooted in feminist pedagogy that still deeply influences my approach to teaching today. When it comes to teaching Interfaith Studies, I would argue that a pedagogy of **co-formation**[4] – which privileges learning *with* the religious other rather than *about* the religious other[5] and includes an emphasis on sustained interfaith engagement, co-learning, and relationship building – is a powerful and promising approach.

Creating a platform for these conversations was my primary motivation for founding (with co-chair Homayra Ziad and fellow steering committee members) the Interreligious and Interfaith Studies group at the American Academy of Religions in 2013. I look forward additional snapshots of this emerging field as we continue to collectively deepen the conversations.

Colleen Windham-Hughes

"I'm pretty sure I'm going to get fired for what I did today." These have often been the first words out of my mouth when I arrive home since I began work in interfaith on my campus. Though I had participated in interfaith dialogue retreats as a graduate student, I considered my interests personal and not professional. I had no particular training for interfaith work and doubts about the scholarly appeal of the work beyond dedicated religionists. My department chair assigned me to be point-person for conversations related

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[4] See Jennifer Peace, "Co-Formation through Interreligious Learning." *Colloquy*, the magazine of the Association of Theological Schools, Fall 2011.

[5] To learn more about the power of "learning with" the religious other, see: Boys, Mary C. & Sara S. Lee, *Christians & Jews in Dialogue: Learning in the Presence of the Other* (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths, 2006).

to interfaith as a new faculty person. To me this indicated confidence in my experience and passion and signaled openness to a new thing at the institution.

The interfaith movement at California Lutheran University began in traditionally co-curricular spaces, with dialogue dinners, service events, and awareness-raising campaigns. Our first crop of passionate and engaged students was drawn from positions of leadership and influence across the student body and wider campus. With each new experience and each new training tool we paused to ask the question, "What does this mean on our campus?" We sought to combine new skills we were gaining from the interfaith movement with new articulation of the Lutheran tradition of higher education. We grew an early identity as connectors across different groups and concerns. Our reputation for facilitating dialogue grew quickly, and we found ourselves being invited to partner with other events to lead discussion across differences about values. Because of this we partnered with Feminism Is, the Community Service Center, and Resident Assistant training. We resisted the pressure to become a student club and cultivated a movement mentality among students, staff, and faculty.

But our students were hungry. Their experiences in service and dialogue made them want to know more. They initiated research projects and signed up for independent studies. They wanted to know more—both the *what* of different religious traditions and the *how* of engagement across differences. Lilly came to Cal Lutheran because she wanted her faith life to be intertwined with study for her Bachelor's degree. She encountered a Christianity very different from the one in which she had come to faith and she retreated into an isolationist position. At the same time, she was drawn into cooperation with the interfaith movement on campus because of the emphasis on service and found herself joyfully serving alongside students, staff, and faculty of different religious traditions and none. She presented her desire to do a directed study in order to develop an exclusivist ethic of religious pluralism. In other words, she wanted to continue to serve and justify serving while maintaining singular claim to truth. She worked diligently through every step and articulated a principled position. And this would have been enough. The next year exclusion and isolation dropped away, but instead of losing her Christianity, she plunged even deeper into it, acquainting herself more fully with the full range of the tradition and learning the love languages for God spoken by mystics. Following graduation she signed up for a year of urban service rooted in an inner city congregation.

Accompanying Lilly challenged me personally. It was impossible to separate her faith questions from her academic questions. I found that her desire to combine them was exactly right, and I had to learn how to be her teacher in that process. Listening to students' questions has required me to share more of myself than I ever thought I would as a college professor. Alongside my students, I, too, have benefited greatly from the storytelling training of Interfaith Youth Core, which encourages both personal reflection and careful

honing of stories to share in public, civic space.[6] The training exposes and encourages honesty about one's convictions and questions. One's own selfhood, including and especially one's religious identity, is clarified and strengthened in serving and talking with others. Religious values are taken seriously and religious people are held accountable. In interfaith experiences it is simply not possible to be isolated, casual, or consumeristic about faith.

Together with a colleague we started addressing civic and personal concerns in our classrooms. We combined classes for "summits" that would be based around real-world examples of faith in the public square, and we offered opportunities to write academic papers that incorporated reflection on co-curricular events. On the strength of those early experiences teaching about interfaith in upper division classes, we are now incorporating some dimensions of interfaith into introductory classes. In a climate of student outcomes the move to include interfaith at the beginning of college education has helped us clarify basic competencies. We use Diana Eck's distinction between diversity as a fact of difference and plurality as engagement of those differences in shared civic space. These fundamental competencies—to think about religion and engage differences in shared space—are not like training in Excel or Photoshop. One cannot demonstrate mastery. Interfaith Studies approaches students as citizens who have to negotiate complex lives and a diversity of neighbors. It is distinguished by outcomes of citizenship (relational competencies)[7]— which are shaped by normative claims that require different pedagogies. It wades into the brackish water where personal commitments, public discourse, and currents of scholarship meet. Here the competencies are practiced over and over again—as habits of heart and mind.

Jeanine Diller is an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy and Program on Religious Studies and Director of the Center for Religious Understanding at the University of Toledo, with a PhD in philosophy of religion from the University of Michigan. She teaches and researches in philosophy of religion and religious studies, concentrating especially on the nature of ultimate reality, the diversity of traditional and secular views of religion, and the power of religion to change the world for ill and for good. She co-edited *Models of God and Other Alternative Ultimate Realities* (Springer 2013), authored several articles, and served as a Fellow in the American Academy/Luce Seminar on Comparative Theology and Theologies of Religious Pluralism. She has also engaged in poverty reduction work in the federal legislative, state executive, and local non-profit sectors. She lives in Ann Arbor with her husband and two sons.

Eboo Patel, of Interfaith Youth Core, maintains the core belief that religion is a bridge of cooperation rather than a barrier of division. He's inspired to build this bridge by his faith as a Muslim, his Indian heritage, and his American citizenship. He has spoken about this vision at places like the TED conference, the Clinton Global Initiative, and the Nobel Peace Prize Forum, as well as college and university campuses across the country. He has written two books about interfaith cooperation, *Acts of Faith* and *Sacred Ground*.

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[6] "From Diversity to Pluralism," *The Pluralism Project,* http://www.pluralism.org/encounter/challenges, accessed March 12, 2015.

[7] *See* "Relational and Procedural Literacies," in *Civility, Religious Pluralism and Education*, Vincent Biondo and Andrew Fiala, eds. London: Routledge, 2014.

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Religion and Peacebuilding: Reflections on Current Challenges and Future Prospects
By Mohammed Abu-Nimer

Introduction[1]

Religion and peacebuilding as a subfield of study and practice has gained significant attention in the past two decades.[2] This has included a new wave of research published in recent years that examines theoretical frameworks and possible intervention models.[3]

Despite the great deal of achievements seen in the field over the last two decades—which has been well documented by leading institutions like the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Religion and Peacebuilding Center, the University of Notre Dame Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, and others—there are short comings and limitations that ought to be addressed. However, it should be emphasized that identifying these limitations or gaps is not a critique of USIP or the World Parliament of Religions, or Al-Azhar dialogue initiative, etc. These limitations exist across the board and are not associated with one specific organization, country or program.

This article focuses on some of the possible areas that the field of religious peacebuilding has yet to successfully address or explore, both in terms of research and practice. Specifically, four questions were identified in order to focus the discussion: 1) What are the main issues that the field has not examined in its practice and research? 2) What are some of the major future possible directions?
3) What are the cutting edge initiatives that are emerging, i.e. the "frontier work"?
4) How can the field of religion and peacebuilding be better integrated with other sectors in the larger field of peace and conflict resolution (PCR)? What follows is a discussion that speaks to these questions by identifying key issues and gaps within religion and peacebuilding.

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[1] This article is based on two panel presentations, KIACIID's panel on interreligious peacebuilding in the annual meeting of AAR in San Diego in November 2014, and an earlier keynote presentation at USIP in October 2012. The views expressed in this article do not represent these organizations. The author is thankful for Timothy Seidel for his review and editorial assistance.

[2] A common feature of any developing field of study and practice is the lack of standardization and the diversity in language and categories one encounters. The same is true in this discussion. So in this essay, I will be using the terms religion and peacebuilding, peacemaking, religious peacebuilding, and interreligious peacebuilding throughout. And while there are nuances to be explored in these different terms, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss them.

[3] See Johnston & Sampson (1994), Abu-Nimer (1996), Sampson (1997), Appleby (2000), Gopin (2000), Sampson & Lederach (2000), Abu-Nimer (2001), Smock (2002), Abu-Nimer (2003), Smock (2006), Little (2007), Abu-Nimer, Khoury & Welty (2007), Abu-Nimer & Augsburger (2009), and Thistlethwaite (2012).

Obviously, it is always challenging to attempt to predict future developments or trends in any given field of study (certainly in a field that involves religion, one does not want to try and give "prophecies" about the future). Thus, it is important to clarify that the following are mainly reflections based on the author's research and practice in this field over the last 25 years, including working in conflict areas such as: Sri Lanka, Palestine/Israel, Mindanao, Chad, Niger, as well as the United States. In addition, as a senior advisor at one of the newly established interreligious dialogue centers that aims to globally engage the community of researchers and practitioners who work in the field of religion and peacebuilding,[4] I have interacted with hundreds of practitioners, researchers, and policy makers between 2013 and 2015. The state of the field of religion and peacebuilding was an integral part of these interactions.

Limitations, Challenges, and Possibilities

Prior to delving into the limitations of the field, there are certain principles that ought to be recognized in order to clarify the context and boundaries of this brief essay.

First, the roles and functions of religion and religious identity in current world affairs can no longer be ignored by researchers and practitioners (especially policy makers). The wave of recent conflicts and the violence that has erupted, especially in the Middle East, and spread to many African and Central Asian countries reflects the need to further understand the role of religion. The need here is not only to understand religion's role in escalating and triggering political violence, but also its potential role in the de-escalation of violent conflict. It is clear that religious identity is an influential factor in the political, social, and economic realities as well as the values and cultural fabric of many communities in the world today.

Second, engaging religious leaders and institutions in peacebuilding on all levels is a crucial key to bringing the message of tolerance, pluralism, and peaceful resolution of conflicts to these communities. Indeed media, government declarations, and secular civil society groups are influential agencies, yet they fall short in reaching out to the communities on the ground, especially in areas in which violence is being spread and instigated in the name of religion. Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia, Yemen are only few examples that illustrate the failure of existing agencies from countering the discourse of violence in the name of religion.

Third, religious peacebuilding is not the sure solution for all social and political problems in any given society. Nevertheless, religious institutions can play a complementary role in responding to these types of problems. Thus, the effectiveness and

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[4] Since 2013 I have worked closely with the KAICIID Dialogue Center (http://www.kaiciid.org/), an intergovernmental organization whose mandate is to promote the use of dialogue globally to prevent and resolve conflict, to enhance understanding and cooperation.

relevance of interreligious peacebuilding can only be evaluated in the context of other micro and macro agencies of change which operate in the same society or community.

Considering the above principles that underlie the discussion in this essay, there are a number of limitations and obstacles that have in many ways obstructed the development of the field of religion and peacebuilding. Some of these are internal or self-imposed and generated factors, while others are external and often imposed by hegemonic cultural, social, and political institutions.

I.   Operates on the fringes:

Religion and peacebuilding as a subfield still operates on the fringes of the larger field of peace and conflict resolution (PCR), which is itself situated on the fringes of international relations, a field dominated by realpolitik or a hegemonic power paradigm, both in academia and in politics. Obviously, there are both internal and external factors that have obstructed this subfield's development into a more mainstream arena or gaining access to the policy making and academic center of power.

Thus practitioners and scholars in this field of religious peacebuilding need to explore more ways to strategically place the work (language, discourses, and strategies) closer to the centers of power. For example, how can interreligious peacemaking programs and initiatives be systematically linked to more formal and institutional diplomatic arena? What are the structures and mechanisms required for interreligious peacemaking to have direct impact on track one (formal political track) processes utilized by governmental agencies?

Some of the factors that have prohibited interreligious peacebuilding from gaining a role in these circles include:

First, the secular cultural myth that religion and faith can and have to be kept outside of political and academic institutions.[5] Such a principle has guided the entire cultural institutional arrangements which govern all systems (political, educational, economic, legal, etc.). As a result of this, any attempt to bring religious or spiritual identity to the center of these systems is faced with significant structural challenges, and individuals who pioneer or lead such efforts are often forced to pay a heavy price for such attempts.

Second, the myth persists that conflicts are only or primarily about material resources and never about religious identity or other ideational factors. Such perceptions are wide spread both among policy makers and even followers of religious traditions. However these two groups deny the involvement of religious dimensions to a specific conflict for two different reasons. The policy makers are often guided by their power politics and interest-

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[5] See Abu-Nimer & Seidel (forthcoming) and Seidel (2014).

based diplomacy or negotiation. While followers of the religions groups refuse to recognize the possible role of religious values, rituals, institutions, or doctrines in triggering and sustaining violence. The most popular argument often declared by the religious leaders in defending their argument is that religion has nothing to do with the conflict or violence, and reduce the analysis to the argument that it is only the misinterpretations of scriptures or lack of understanding of the original or true message of their faith.

Third, due to the marginalization of the field, there are very limited resources and opportunities for support by professional organizations, donors, or even religious leaders and institutors when dealing with religious peacemaking. In other words, the dominant perceptions and biases named above have real material consequences, in both academic and policy arenas, in terms of identifying strategic priorities and allocating institutional resources. Religious peacebuilding is seldom considered let alone identified in those priorities and so does not benefit from those resources. For example, just quick scan of the structure and resource allocations of the United Nations various agencies reflects the deep level of marginalization of religious and spiritual identity in its mission and operation.

Fourth, as mentioned above, the field of religion and peacebuilding is a subfield of the peace and conflict resolution (PCR) field, which has developed tremendously in the last four decades. Over 400 undergraduate academic programs, over fifteen graduate programs, and six doctoral programs operate in the United States alone. Hundreds of nongovernmental organizations operating in countries around the world mainly specialize in implementing peace and conflict resolution programs.[6] Practitioners in the PCR field have developed a great number of tools and processes of intervention (including, mediation, facilitation, problem solving, interest based negotiation, reconciliation, dialogue, etc.). However, in the religion and peacebuilding field, the application of such tools remains underdeveloped, especially the adaptation of these processes to conflicts that have religious dimensions. Thus existing approaches utilized by practitioners in religious peacemaking are still rooted in and strongly tied to the secular and humanist approaches that continue to dominate peace and conflict resolution mechanisms techniques.

II.   No evaluation mechanism to trace impact:

Despite the recent wave of interest in peacebuilding evaluation expressed by various donors, religious peacemaking—similar to the larger peace and conflict resolution field—has not yet developed systematic methods to capture either its micro or macro effect or impact.[7]

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[6] See Zelizer & Johnston (2005) as well as the Peace and Collaborative Development Network (PCDN) website at http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/.

[7] Recently in 2014 there have been some organizations who began exploring the need for interreligious peacebuilding evaluation frameworks. For example, the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AFP) (http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/) launched a special interreligious peacebuilding evaluation program, as a result of a generous grant from the GHR foundation (http://www.ghrfoundation.org/). For

In its current state, evaluators in the field of interreligious peacebuilding can trace how participants in one workshop of interfaith dialogue have been affected by the workshop and have transformed their interpersonal and individual relationships. In their existing evaluation tools and frameworks, evaluators are able to measure the change in attitudes and behaviors of participants in such activities. They can also trace the institutional changes at the organizational level as a result of the interreligious peacebuilding engagement. For example, an organization might change its structure by adding staff from other faith groups, add members to its board of directors, open new branches in other faith communities, issue institutional declaration denouncing sectarian violence and hate speech, change in local governmental policies, policies regarding interreligious relations, etc.

However, existing evaluation frameworks in the field lack tools on how to trace the cumulative effect of all the above possible meso-level indicators of change on macro level impact. For example, to what extent has interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding efforts in the Israeli Palestinian conflict contributed to the overall relationships between Arabs and Jews in Israel/Palestine? Similarly, since the 1980s what type of contribution has the field of interreligious dialogue made in the context of macro communal relations in Northern Ireland? Neither the field of peacebuilding nor interreligious peacebuilding has developed systematic and empirical answers to the above questions.

The lack of such systematic evaluation frameworks has hindered to a large extent the development of effective models that can guide practitioners in their intervention. Thus, there is a pressing need to address questions such as: What is unique about the religious peacebuilding tools and approaches? What conditions and factors are needed for interpersonal, organizational, and societal changes to take place as a result of religious peacebuilding interventions? Why do certain intervention models work and how? And how do we know?

For example, in 2010 the author was involved in conducting a workshop with Iraqi interfaith dialogue facilitators. The trainees were amazingly courageous and open to learn new skills and implement these tools. Each one out of the 15 trainers has completed several workshops and trained other community members in interfaith dialogue and pluralism. Thousands of people have been affected by their activities, because many of them organized interfaith and intrafaith discussions following the screening of the film of the Nigeria Pastor and Imam, who worked together for reconciliation. The film was well received by Iraqi participants or audiences. For example, Saleh, an Iraqi man in his mid-60s who publically cried watching the film and took it on himself to bring the field and

more on the peacebuilding evaluation program at AFP see http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/our-work/about-our-work/peacebuilding-evaluation/.

interfaith dialogue into this community, said: "this is the type of reconciliation we need in Iraq today. We lack the presence of such religious leaders."[8]

Nevertheless, two years after the program has been completed, Iraqi communities are still living in fear, anxiety, and the sectarian divides are growing. Evaluators of this specific initiative have no measures or tools to detect the effect of these workshops and programs on the larger context of Iraq.

One of the issues in this discussion is the perception of peacebuilding evaluation itself. For many practitioners, they see little value in the attempts to evaluate results. For some this is due to their suspicions either of the ability to actually measure such results or suspicion of donor pressures to dictate local peacebuilding program designs and priorities. However for others, despite the above limitations in measuring macro impact, they feel it is enough for interreligious peacemakers to be "believers" that participants have benefited and have transferred their knowledge and skills to their communities. For them "faith or belief in the divine calling to make peace" is enough. This clearly presents challenges to mainstreaming evaluation in religious peacebuilding.

Another current example is the Forum for Intercultural Dialogue (FID), which has operated in Egypt for the last twenty years, conducting hundreds of workshops and training for Christians and Muslims in all districts of Egypt. Hundreds of their participants have been active in the Egyptian revolution. They have published dozens of books and other publications on interfaith dialogue and pluralism in Egyptian society. Despite this the program has very little evidence of their contribution to the macro political level and on the Egyptian discourse of tolerance and coexistence between religious groups.

Nevertheless, despite the explosion of sectarian violence in Egypt every few months, one still encounters the perspective that "we are all deeply committed and 'believe' we have an impact on Muslim Christian relations in Egypt."[9]

The same story can be found in Israeli Palestinian interfaith peacebuilding. There are many who believe that it is effective despite the macro deterioration of Arab Jewish relations in Israel Palestine context.

In explaining this reality, practitioners point to number of factors. First, as mentioned above, there is no specialized research to design more systematic evaluation mechanisms. Second, many of the interfaith officers who implement these programs often are not professionally trained in program design and implementation, and certainly not trained in basic monitoring and evaluation techniques. Third, the donors demand impact measures, yet in most cases donors and implementers fail to allocate resources to macro or

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[8] Interview with Saleh, Irbil, Kurdistan, November 8, 2010.
[9] Interview with a Muslim facilitator in the FID program, Cairo, Egypt, December 7, 2014.

systematic micro evaluation; "they do not take it seriously," as stated by one international evaluator.[10]

III.   Limited and weak presence in academic institutions:

Peace and conflict resolution programs in North America and around the world have grown tremendously in recent years. This rapid growth in academic degrees has flooded the job market with master's degree graduates, yet with a limited number of jobs.

Nevertheless, within the field of peace and conflict resolution there is little emphasis on religious peacemaking.[11] For example, in the leading 5 U.S. academic institutions in Peace and Conflict Resolution, there are only 1-2 courses on religion and peace. There are two graduate programs that have developed a certificate or specialization. There is one PhD program that has been developed with such a specialty.[12]

Academic institutions and peace and conflict resolution have not yet embraced religious peacemaking as an integral part of its institutional structure or academic offering. There are a few institutions with endowed chairs in religious peacemaking, but they lack the funding and capacity to promote the academic offering in their institutions.

There are number of factors that can help in explaining this. First, Peace and Conflict Resolution programs themselves, in comparison to the disciplines of Political Science and International Relations, are often categorized, perceived or labeled by other departments as "soft sciences," less rigorous or "naïve", etc. Thus, Peace and Conflict Resolution programs hesitate to include religious peacemaking in their curriculum to avoid contributing to the above images within their academic institutions—underscoring the point above regarding the perception of religion as somehow outside the bounds of legitimate academic inquiry or politic discourse.

Second, academic institutions and the rigid disciplinary divisions have made it difficult for religious peacebuilding to establish itself as a separate or integrated discipline. Third, in general and especially in Western academic settings, religion is viewed as a sensitive and private matter. This obstacle affects all other areas too, however in academic and government institutions in which public space is protected. Thus when introducing

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[10] Focus group of international evaluators, KAICIID conference on interreligious dialogue, Vienna, Austria, November 18, 2014.

[11] Every year hundreds of students graduate with master's degrees from at least 15 different graduate schools in the United States alone. See Carstarphen, et al (2010) as well as this "Guide to MA Programs in Peace and Conflict Resolution" at http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/profiles/blogs/guide-to-ma-program-in-peace.

[12] In addition to Emory University, which launched a program in religion and peace in 2012, the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego also initiated new program in 2014.

religious and faith frameworks the issue becomes very challenging to any agent of change: "We do not talk about 'our God' and definitely not Allah in the classroom."[13]

IV.   We still protect your children from religious pluralism

Despite the flourishing of religious peace programming, the overwhelming majority of these programs are still targeting adults and community members, especially clergy. The overwhelming majority of religious groups and sects continue to protect their children from "education for religious pluralism." Sunday schools rarely get a Muslim talking about his/her faith, certainly Muslims in Sunday school or Friday schools, do not get Christian, Jewish, Buddhist monk to explain their faith principles and practices. In Egypt, when the trainer suggested that a guest speakers to be invited to the Sunday Schools or have a priest come to the mosque to speak to the Muslim children, both sides were furious and argued that such an act will provoke their communities.[14] The same reality exists in many Northern faith communities.

Obviously there are some programs in the field of interreligious peacebuilding that focus on interfaith education for children. However the above observation reflects major trends and is not an attempt to generalize to all religious peace initiatives. The few initiatives on religious peacemaking for children tend to be the smallest in scale and least accessible.

In an attempt to explain such trends in the field, a few factors emerged. First, religious clergy are still operating as gatekeepers of their faith and feel that their community has entrusted them with their children. Thus they are protective of the spiritual needs and identity of their young generation. Second, the assumption that children need to know their faith first and should not be confused with different doctrines before their have formulated their religious identity. Third, there is a perception by some that interfaith dialogue and interfaith education might weaken ones' own faith.

V.   Mainstreaming gender in religious peacebuilding:

Some progress has been made in introducing women's experiences and perspectives in the peacebuilding field (primarily due to the efforts of international agencies such as the UN, USAID, DFID, World Bank, etc.). In interreligious peacemaking (academic, organizations, and participants), the majority of the programming and their organizations remain male dominated (both in perspective and representation).

In the case of Israel/Palestine, there is a pioneer women's interfaith group that has been operating since 2005. However in many conflict areas, there is simply very little

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[13] As a student of interfaith dialogue noted as she criticize her school said in a dialogue group discussion 2015, American University, Washington, D.C.

[14] Interfaith training in Cairo, Egypt, December 5, 2014.

access for women to these activities.[15] For example, after two years of working with religious peacebuilding and pluralism in Islamic Quranic schools in Chad and Niger, Salam Institute for Peace and Justice trainers were finally granted access to women's Quranic schools. However, the clergy would not allow or promote the participation of the women of their community in interfaith dialogue meetings, and certainly not as panelists or facilitators. Such realities also exist in international organizations such as UN Women, the United Nations agency that focus on women. The agency does not have a single program on women and religious identity (let alone women and interreligious peacebuilding).[16]

There are too many instances that reflect the lack of proportional representation of women in interfaith dialogue and in interreligious peacemaking in general, especially when the programs are focusing on theological conversations or issues or when the target audience of the program is defined as institutional leadership.
However, the lack of engagement of women in theological conversations or in leadership in interfaith dialogue changes when we examine the field at a grassroots level, as documented by Susan Hayward and Katherine Marshall and the reports by the network Women Waging Peace.[17] At such levels of interreligious peacebuilding women participation is far more visible, even more than men in various areas.

When attempting to explain the underrepresentation of women in interreligious dialogue on a leadership level, several factors are identified. First, religious institutions themselves are still structurally dominated by men. For example, a majority of religious structures prohibit women from assuming full leadership in the realm of theological interpretations and leading their congregations or community of followers. In the Abrahamic tradition, various Christians denominations have recently opened the gates of leadership to women. In Muslim communities, a few Muslim women like Amina Wadud or Afra Jalabi have taken pioneer steps to challenge the domination of male preachers,

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[15] However this group is very small and marginal in the subfield field of interreligious peacebuilding in Israel Palestine. In addition, its work and even mere presence have been affected greatly by the polarization and waves of political violence that swept the region in the last decade. See more detailed about this interfaith women group in Abu-Nimer, Khoury, and Welty (2007).

[16] Discussion in International Women's Day 2015, UN Side Event, March 13, 2015.

[17] See Marshall et al (2011) and Hayward (2015) as well as the Women Waging Peace website at http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/.

especially in mosques[18]. This reality shapes the nature, scope, and level of women representation in interreligious peacebuilding and dialogue field.[19]

Second, interfaith dialogue is often defined as a space to talk about political problems or community relations problems. Such themes in many cases have been defined by most social norms, especially in traditional patriarchal societies as the male domains. Such structural conditions often limit women's access to interreligious peacebuilding, especially when it is primarily defined or frame politically by the intervention design.

Third, although there are a few private and governmental donors who have invested in supporting interreligious peacebuilding, the majority of such donors neglect or do not insist on incorporating or mainstreaming women's voices in the programs that they support.[20]

VI.   Religious peacebuilding is lacking in reaching out to media

Like the peace and conflict resolution field, religious peacebuilding has not invested enough resources in developing strategies and approaches to handle or reach out to media outlets. For example, observing the Arab revolutions in which youth and media constitute the primary engines behind the protest, it is obvious that for any peacemaking programs to become effective in mobilizing large segment of society, it has to establish creative ways to present itself and engage all forms of media.

In addition, since the early 1990s the "telereligious ïndusty" have made serious breakthroughs in its capacity to reach out to followers of all faith traditions. Thus there is no shortage of religious media. In fact, there are many religious stations or satellite programs, both in Northern and Southern hemispheres, which preach intolerance and hatred, and contribute to ethnic and sectarian violence. [21]

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[18] Obviously there is a growing body of literature that examines all religions from a critical gender analysis lenses, nevertheless, some have stepped forward to challenge the practice of certain rituals and beliefs, and systems. See references on Amina Wadud case who led mixed gender prayer in a New York Muslim community setting: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/31/gender.religion ; http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/19/nyregion/19muslim.html?_r=2&; http://pluralism.org/reports/view/111. In the case of Afra Jalabi she delivered Eid Khotba in 2014 in a Canadian gender mixed Muslim community.

[19] As a senior advisor at KAICIID, the author has faced such challenge of integrating women's voices in interreligious peacebuilding at policy-making levels. Through several international summits, institutional religious representation was overwhelmingly dominated by male clergy. See descriptions of the global assemblies' panels and representation at http://www.kaiciid.org/.

[20] Based on discussion among interreligious donor affinity group sponsored by El Hibri Foundation, Washington DC October 20, 2014.

[21] Both European and American media have contributed to the phenomenon of Islamophobia, and the negative images of Westerners and other foreigners are an integral part of many media outlets in the Muslim world. In the United States, organizations like the Center for American Progress

In 2014, a number of initiatives were launched to intentionally build the capacity of religious leaders in social media and media in general. This came especially after the widespread threat of ISIS who creatively mastered the use of media to globally disseminate its message of exclusion, hate, and destruction. In their efforts to counter this security threat, a number of governments have started paying additional attention to the potential use of media by religious leaders to inject a discourse of interreligious pluralism and tolerance.[22]

The lack of capacity and awareness for the use of social media and media among interreligious peacebuilders can be explained by several factors. First, the existing religious media outlets themselves are part of the problem of promoting violence in the name of religion. In many conflict areas, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, or Somalia, as well as Western communities, extreme right wing religious groups have integrated religious media into the existing "war-making system." Many of these religious media stations are mainly devoted to propagating one faith—their own—and excluding and denying other faith groups or sects from existence. They are often supported by political or ideological exclusionist agendas. Second, public media outlets are similar to government and academic institutions in most cases (especially in the Western hemisphere they separate the religious or faith from the public sphere or life). Thus dealing with religious identities in any form becomes a sensitive issue for these media outlets. Third, religious peacemaking is not the most attractive source of news. A group of "religious men" debating or answering questions about their faith does not make headlines.

VII.   The interreligious enclave syndrome:

Interreligious peacebuilding programs and organizations are often isolated from the larger peacebuilding field, and certainly from political and social movements for peace and change. Integrating, coordinating, and networking with social and political movements for justice and peace are crucial strategies for those peace workers who aim to bring structural changes to their society.

It is often documented that in conflict areas there are certain interreligious peacebuilding activities and organizations which consciously frame their work as non-

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(https://www.americanprogress.org/) and Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (http://fair.org/) have published studies documenting Islamophobia in American media.

[22] In an attempt to counter this limitation among religious leaders to utilize media and social media for peace and pluralism messaging, KAICIID produced a toolkit to enhance the capacity and raise awareness of religious leaders in such area (see, media and interreligious dialogue program at: http://www.kaiciid.org/. Other governmental agencies, such as the U.S. State Department began integrating social media as one of the themes in their counter terrorism and extremism programs (see Global Summit for Counter Violence held in Washington DC in 2015).

political or carried out by actors who deliberately disconnect themselves and their programs from the existing social and political peace movements (Abu-Nimer, 2010).

For example, in Israel/Palestine, there are a number of interfaith dialogue groups and organizations. When interviewed these organizers did not perceive themselves as a part of the Israeli Palestinian peace movement. In fact they deliberately disassociated themselves form such movements (Abu-Nimer, 2007). Such interreligious leaders did not see themselves as partners who could take stands for economic, social, or political justice. There are similar cases in the United States. For example, very few interfaith groups joined the Occupy Wall Street campaign in various American cities. However, this pattern of isolation does not imply that there are no interreligious or multifaith organizations that are active in advocacy for social and political justice. But these groups are often clearly distinct from those religious peacebuilders that focus on dialogue, cultural and religious exposure programs.

In articulating the possible reasons that affect the interfaith dialogue and interreligious peacemaking decisions to stay away from peace and protest movements, various factors are identified. First, interfaith dialogue programs tend to be operated by faith-based initiatives or individuals who have had little professional training as community organizers or peacemakers. These officers tend to lack the skills or strategic and in-depth analysis of the conflict that they operate in. Many are mainly motivated by faith. Strategic alliances are not part of their faith-based planning programming. On the contrary, linking their efforts with other social movement groups and organizations might be viewed as risky and dangerous, especially in a conflict context.

Second, in many cases interfaith initiatives are de-politicized because they tend to be supported by government agencies or donors who represent the mainstream establishment or dominant majority organizations. Thus any link to social or political groups might be negatively perceived by the donor. For example, the Israeli government will support interfaith programs (not financially, but certainly ideological), while Palestinian organizations support nonviolence resistance and social justice movements. Until the Egyptian revolution in 2011, the government often supported or endorsed interfaith dialogue programs between Muslim and Christians that were mainly apolitical (Abu-Nimer, 2007). In the Arab world, many of the interfaith and interreligious groups stood by, waiting on the dividing line for too long before they joined the social nonviolence movements characterizing the Arab Spring. Such organizations often operate within the realm of the mainstream establishment. Similar patterns exists in conflict areas such many interreligious organizations in Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, etc. For example, majority of the interreligious institutions in Sri Lanka between 2007 and 2010,

rarely took a clear stand against certain governmental policies, especially during the protest against the war (2007-2010).[23]

Conclusions

      Despite the limitations identified in the above analysis and reflections, there is no doubt that religion and peacebuilding as a field is growing and expanding. Governmental as well as nongovernmental agencies, research centers, think tanks, and the donors funding this work are beginning to discover and explore the potential effect that religious institutions and actors have in reaching out to grassroots communities. Unfortunately, these realizations have mainly been a product of their failure to overcome or defeat the religious extremism and growing security threats, especially in European and American context. Thus, policy makers are starting to recognize the fact that a pastor, an imam, or a monk can be a key force in curtailing the discourse of radicalism and extremism on a village, neighborhood, or even at family levels.

      Such a realization is essential and contributes to the ability of religious leaders to play their proportional role in building peace in their communities and the world. However agencies who support interreligious peacebuilding for such purposes ought to be careful not to negatively impact or harm local religious actors or organizations by wrapping their interreligious peacebuilding and dialogue efforts with a framing or a blanket of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism. This approach delegitimizes and reduces the moral authority of many religious actors. They become associated with governmental agencies and foreign political and ideological agendas. For interreligious peacebuilding actors to be credible and effective in their intervention, their discourse has to continue and rely on their moral and spiritual message, values, and beliefs.[24] In addition, when the counter terrorism and extremism become the main lenses in which policy makers, researchers, and donor agencies approach or introduce interreligious peacebuilding, the field and its actors (leaders and their institutions) is perceived as being manipulated by political structures and eventually loose their capacity to reach out to large segments of the world population. To maintaining spiritual and moral authenticity in interreligious peacebuilding, and addressing the limitations identified in the earlier sections of this essay, there are several other initiatives that can contribute the advancement of the field of religious peacebuilding: First, professional development of the field is needed. This could include the initiating of an annual international conference sponsored by a Religious Peacebuilding Practice and Study Association (RPPSA). Such an association could certainly promote further legitimacy of the

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[23] It should be noted that often in such conflict areas government and security policies tend to be extremely strict and brutal. They leave very little space for any public organization or movement to express dissent or opposing views against g political or national authority and policies. In each of the listed countries, religious and secular civil society leaders have been killed and imprisoned for their reluctant to publically side with governmental policies.

[24] Throughout 2014 and 2015, in their campaign to fight ISIS, many Muslim and western governments have launched multireligious or unireligious campaigns and enlisted top religious leaders to take stand against this extreme groups, however such initiatives were mainly framed from a security and counter terrorism lenses and narratives

field in both academic and policy circles. Second, there is a need for a special Journal of Religious Peacebuilding (JRP). Such a publication could provide a space for scholars and practitioners to explore theories, methodologies, and applications of religious peacebuilding worldwide and in multi-religious settings. A refereed journal will certainly advance the status and visibility of religious peacebuilding in the field of peace and conflict resolution.

Third, launching a network for Religious Peacebuilding (NRP), which would function as a professional networking for practitioners that enhance the capacity of scholar practitioners to reflect and disseminate their experiences.

Finally, researchers and scholars of interreligious peacebuilding need to further develop a research agenda that is rooted in both the field of peacebuilding practice and in scholarship. Such an agenda would be instrumental in advancing the accumulation of knowledge and theory building in this field, in order to answer questions such as: what makes interreligious peacebuilding effective? Are the theories of change that underlie interreligious peacebuilding different or similar from other peacebuilding processes? How essential is theological interpretation and reinterpretation for interreligious peacebuilding? How can interreligious peacebuilding operate within a secular paradigm?

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Prof. Abu-Nimer is the founder of Salam Institute for Peace and Justice and co-founder and co-editor of the Journal of Peacebuilding and Development. He holds a PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University. As a scholar he has published many books and article, including: *Peace-Building By, Between and Beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*, (Abu-Nimer and Augsburger, eds. New York: Lexington, 2009).*Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East* (Abu-Nimer, Khoury, and Welty, Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2007). *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide For Muslims* (with Muhammad Shafiq) Herndon, Virginia: International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIT), 2007. *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islamic: Theory and Practice*. Gainesville, FL.: University Press of Florida, 2003. *Reconciliation, Coexistence, and Justice: Theory and Practice*. (Ed.) New York: Rowman & Little Field, 2001.

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Perspectives from Sociology: Modeling Religious Pluralism from Inward and Outward
By Karsten Lehmann and Anne Koch

1. Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a significant increase in academic research on Interreligious Dialogue (IRD). Catherine Cornille's 2013 *Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*[1] calls for a consolidation of the discussions on interreligious dialogue in a new way. Along those lines, other scholars have started to interrogate the power dynamics and meaningful systematic relations that underlie dialogical activities emerging as the result of an increased religious pluralism worldwide.[2]

Against this background, the paper at hand focuses on what can be – in the widest sense – described as 'sociological approaches' to the analysis of interreligious dialogue – with a particular emphasis on the concerned discussion in Germany. Since 2010, three works have set a new tone in the German study of IRD by introducing three major themes:

1. The usage of the concept of religion put forward by central actors in the field of interreligious dialogue.
2. The framing of interreligious dialogue activities with regard to concepts of 'religious pluralism.'
3. The significance of conflict as a major concept in those debates.

The present article aims to follow this particular tradition. It asks the question to what extent an approach that treats IRD as a socio-cultural phenomenon can provide a contribution to the study of IRD in general. On this basis, the paper presents the following two themes:

- In the debates on interreligious dialogue, the category of religion is constructed in a particularly ambiguous way.

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[1] Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2013).

[2] Paul M. Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theologies of Religions* (London/Norwich: SCM Press, 2010); and Daniel S. Brown, ed., *A Communicative Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue: Living within the Abrahamic Faith* (Lanham/Boulder: Lexington Books, 2013).

- The idea of a 'secular world' for the understanding of interreligious dialogue activities is, at least, as important as the notion of 'religious pluralism.'

In order to further elaborate on these themes, the paper is divided into three major sections. It begins with methodological reflections on the sociological discussion of IRD. To do so, it presents short descriptions of three recent sociological analyses on interreligious dialogue in Germany, and the final section presents a specific reading of those analyses in order to provide further suggestions for the analysis of interreligious dialogue as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

2. Sociological Discussions of interreligious dialogue

Evidently, scholars and authors are aware of the fact that the disciplinary attributions are highly complex. During the last fifty years, all academic disciplines have gone through processes of accelerating internal differentiation. Accordingly, it is almost impossible to identify one single sociological approach to religions. For example, in 2013, Grace Davie clearly made a point on how Sociology is subdivided into a wide range of different schools (from classical hermeneutics to rational choice and critical theory), as well as how those schools have developed their own approaches to religion.[3] This is even more significant in academic contexts such as the Academic Study of Religions that is characterized by references to many different disciplines while at the same time being dominated by a high degree of boundary work.[4]

Having said that, the following considerations occur from a rather simple observation: Since 2010, an increasing group of German scholars of religions has been explicitly trying to provide new approaches to the analysis of IRD activities. On the one hand, they have based their analyses upon the systematic collection of empirical data (be it via interviews, surveys or data from the media). On the other hand, they have been approaching those sets of data with well-established methods from the social sciences such as content analyses, discourse analyses, or statistical analyses.

The results of those researches provide a two-fold contribution to the Anglo-Saxon debates on IRD: First, they help to assess the strengths and the weaknesses of an approach that is systematically restricting its analyses to socio-cultural phenomena, thus labeled sociological. Second, they refer to researches that come out of linguistic contexts frequently neglected inside the USA – thus hopefully enriching the debates in the context of the AAR. For the purpose of the present paper, the authors focus on three rather recent publications that will help to map the diversity of the analyses in question: a) Gritt Klinkhammer, Hans-Ludwig Frese, Ayla Satilmis, and Tina Seibert: *Interreligious and intercultural Dialogue with*

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[3] Grace Davie, *Sociology of Religion: A Critical Agenda* (London: Sage Publications, 2013).
[4] Oliver Freiberger, "Die deutsche Religionswissenschaft im transnationalen Fachdiskurs," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 21 (2013) 1-28.

Muslims in Germany; b) Martin Rötting: *Religion in Motion*; and c) Simone Sinn: *Religious Pluralism in the Becoming*.[5]

3. Three Major Contributions

All the aforementioned publications have been published rather recently. They are part of a body of literature that has been developed since 2010, and that has shown an explicit interest in working on new analytical approaches for the study of IRD activities.

3.1. Gritt Klinkhammer et al., *Interreligious and intercultural Dialogue with Muslims in Germany*

As far as its general scope is concerned, the work of Gritt Klinkhammer and her team from the University of Bremen can so far be described as the most inclusive research of IRD that has so far been conducted in Germany. Klinkhammer's project starts from two interconnected questions that are actually quite close to a Monitoring & Evaluation rationale: What types of concrete activities are taking place under the label of IRD? And what kind of influence do those activities have on the wider public?

Gritt Klinkhammer and her team try to answer those questions from the point of view of the Academic Study of Religions as well as the Sociology of Religions. With a Master from the University of Marburg and a PhD from the University of Hannover, Klinkhammer is now teaching History and Theory of Religions at the University of Bremen. Her background is primarily related to work on Islam and migration in general as well as the history of Sufism in Germany. The analyses of IRD activities form a rather recent part of her research activities.

In front of this background, the analyses presented in 'Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue with Muslims in Germany' bring together two extensive sets of data: (a) 132 short descriptions of dialogue initiatives in Germany, based upon information collected via a questionnaire that was sent out to 270 organizations, and (b) 20 more detailed qualitative descriptions of case-studies, consisting of data primarily collected via in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions.

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[5] Gritt Klinkhammer et al.,*„Interreligiöser und interkultureller Dialog mit MuslimInnen in Deutschland, Eine quantitative und qualitative Studie* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Religionswissenschaft und Religionspädagogik) (Bremen: University of Bemen 2011); Martin Rötting, *Religion in Bewegung. Dialog-Typen und Prozess im interreligiösen Lernen* (serie: Interreligiöse Begegnungen. Studien und Projekte 9) (Münster: Lit 2012); and Simone Sinn, [*Religious Pluralism in the Becoming. Religio-Political Controversies and Theological Perspectives of Christians and Muslims in Indonesia] Religiöser Pluralismus im Werden. Religionspolitische Kontroversen und theologische Perspektiven von Christen und Muslimen in Indonesien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2014).

The group around Klinkhammer analyzes this material primarily in the tradition of qualitative research methods.[6] They make the point that dialogue initiatives can be described along the lines of four ideal types (2011: 23-37):

- At the center of almost all IRD activities, the researchers from Bremen see awareness raising (Ger. "Sensibilisierung") for the situation of immigrants by providing basic knowledge via courses, public lectures, etc.
- As a second type they identify cooperative problem solving (Ger. kooperatives Problemlösungshandeln) that tries to work towards an increasing integration of immigrants, using public networking, campaigning, etc.
- In addition, they use the ideal type of empowerment, focusing on the reinforcement of joint concerns (such as spirituality or feminism) with joint prayers, working groups, etc.
- Finally, the researchers argue that there is a fourth type they describe as theological debates that is dominated by discussions among experts, and that seems to be at the margins of IRD initiatives rather than at their center.

On the basis of those observations, it is possible to highlight two further results of this project that are of particular significance for the following debates – on the one hand the 'Wirkungsanalyse' (effect analysis) of concrete IRD activities, and on the other hand the reflections on the empirical usage of the concept of religion in interreligious dialogue:

(1) In the Bremen-project, the effect analysis has primarily been undertaken on the basis of survey-data, and is based upon the 'self-description' of the participants of the survey. On this basis, the authors come to two conclusions. (a) Across all the different types of IRD activities, 74.4% of the participants describe 'changes in the attitudes of the participants' as the main aim of their activities (31.8% changes in the participating religious associations; 18.6 % changes in public opinion; 9.3% changes on the level of public administration – 21.7% only marginal changes) (p. 88). (b) The majority of the survey-participants (more or less independent from their respective religious affiliation) identify three main restrictions their activities are facing: absence of resources, influences by media, and existing conflicts. (p. 91)

(2) The sections on the concept of religion in interreligious dialogue rely primarily on qualitative data: On this basis, Klinkhammer and her colleagues came to the conclusion that the concept of religion used by IRD practitioners differs fundamentally according to the different types of IRD initiatives they can be attributed to. Dialogue activities that are close to theological debates use a totally different concept of religions than those dialogues that are close to the awareness raising type. In both cases, however, the qualitative data suggest that dialogue

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[6] Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles/London/New Delhi, 2014); and Stefan Kurth and Karsten Lehmann, Religionen erforschen: Kulturwissenschaftliche Methoden in der Religionswissenschaft (Wiesbaden, 2011).

activities are part of the implementation of a particular usage of the word religion in Germany. In the study, this becomes particularly clear with regard to (a) the relation between the researchers and those dialogue activities dominated by Christian participants (that tried to obtain the theological definitions of interreligious dialogue), and (b) the links with the integration discourse (that favored a particularly 'liberal' take on religion).

In both contexts, the concept of religion used by the IRD participants tends to reproduce a mainstream ideal of religion. This significance of the different types of IRD-activities forms the centre of Rötting's analyses, too.

3.2. Martin Rötting: *Religion in Motion*

Martin Rötting's approach to IRD differs from Klinkhammer et al. in two ways. On the one hand, he focuses exclusively on individual constructions of IRD activities, modeling them along the lines of learning processes. On the other hand, Rötting has a double inside-outside profile as a theologian, an academic scholar of religions as well as a pastoral counselor. This educational background and profile makes his work distinct in his interests for application of research results.

These differences notwithstanding, Rötting also has a cultural studies understanding of religion as a pluralistic and competitive field. Since he explicitly follows the aim of interreligious activism and interreligious education, learning theory forms his main frame of reference and his analysis is agent-based instead of institution-based. Rötting sees religious plurality in modern societies as an empirical 'fact' and the pluralizing factor as the central difference in the respective agents' learning behavior and value-orientedness. Dialogue therefore has to start for Rötting on a personal and spiritual, value-oriented base, especially since existential convergence may connect people across a plurality of religions. For Rötting, modern self-reflexive agents use communicational skills to engage in dialogue.

Rötting is the author of several books and uncountable articles on interreligious dialogue. He studied religious education at the Catholic University Eichstätt and received a Master in Theology at Trinity College in Dublin/Ireland. His PhD in the Academic Study of Religions at Munich University is about the Christian-Buddhist-Dialogue in South Korea.[7] With qualitative methods he conducted interviews with Christians and Buddhists in South Korea to find out about individual learning processes in the context of interreligious encounters. In a critical discussion of David A. Kolb's learning theory[8] Rötting's research

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[7] Martin Rötting, [Interreligious Learning within Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: An approach from learning theory and an empirical research in South Korea and Germany] Interreligiöses Lernen im buddhistisch-christlichen Dialog, Lerntheoretischer Zugang und empirische Untersuchung in Deutschland und Südkorea (St. Ottilien: Eos 2007).

[8] David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984).

begins from the definition of a "starting point" (Ger. Anknüpfungspunkt) that connects two persons in interreligious encounter (2007: 203-38). From this starting point, several learning developments are reconstructed on the ground of empirical data and mapped in a learning circle (2012: 28).

These considerations form the elaborate background of the present book, *Religion in Motion: Dialogue-types and processes of interreligious learning.* In this book, Rötting applies (and tests) results he started to formulate as an active participant in the local Munich interreligious field. Currently he works on a doctoral habilitation at Munich University on "Spiritual identity in an interreligious world: An empirical study in Munich, New York, Vilnius, Seoul, Dublin and Istanbul." Besides his research on IRD, Rötting also publishes in the field of pastoral counseling on Zen-Buddhism[9] or *Interreligious Spirituality.*[10] As of today, he works as a theological advisor and counselor at the Catholic university parish in Munich. As a result, one publication is on the religious diversity on the campus.[11] He is the founder and CEO of the association *Occurso: Institute of interreligious and intercultural encounter.*[12] This Munich-based charitable association is dedicated to research on interreligious dialogue, interreligious encounters and the education of dialogue moderators for interreligious-secular settings or conflicts.[13]

In his guided interviews in *Religion in Motion*, Rötting determines types of agents in interreligious dialogue according to learning theory. His sample in Munich comprises around one hundred interviews. As a result, he comes up with six ideal types of dialogue agents:
- According to Rötting, spiritual pilgrims are mainly motivated by their own spiritual development and self-realization and therefore are prone to spiritual and existential transformation. They easily connect with other faiths on this dynamic and existential level.[14]
- The social activist is also oriented towards transformation but with a focus on social work. Integration politics is often a cause to engage in interreligious dialogue.

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[9] [Mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers: Encounters with Korean Zen-Buddhism] Berge sind Berge, Flüsse sind Flüsse. Begegnung mit dem koreanischen Zen-Buddhismus. Ein Beitrag zum christlich-buddhistischen Dialog (St. Ottilien: Eos, 2001).

[10] [Interreligious Spirituality: Responsible Exchanges of Religions] Interreligiöse Spiritualität. Verantwortungsvoller Umgang der Religionen (EOS-Verlag, St. Ottilien, 2008).

[11] [The whole world on campus!? Cultural and religious diversity.] Die ganze Welt am Campus!? Kulturelle und religiöse Diversitäten. Situationen und Perspektiven. (Münster: Lit 2012a).

[12] Homepage: Occurso. Institut für inerreligiöse und interkulturelle Begegnung, URL: www.occurso.de, access 12. March 2015.

[13] Latest publication of this association: Martin Rötting, Simone Sinn, and Aykan Inan, eds., *Praxisbuch Interreligiöser Dialog. Begegnungen initiieren und begleiten* (St. Ottilien: Eos 2015).

[14] This relates to the findings of an empirical study on alternative spirituality and hybrid forms of religious practices in Franconia, Bavaria by Winfried Gebhard, Martin Engelbrecht and Christoph Bochinger, „Die Selbstermächtigung des spirituellen Subjekts. Der ,spirituelle Wanderer' als Idealtypus spätmoderner Spiritualität," in: Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft 13 (2005) 133-51.

- The <u>religio-cultural democrat</u> is Rötting's third type. It stands for IRD activists that want to realize a fair and peaceful community on the base of democratic values. This type is equally related to the society and his or her religious values.
- The <u>humanitarian agent</u> in interreligious learning is deeply driven by values beyond all religions and worldviews. He relates to an essentialist horizon of his belief system and seeks for experience in his believing.
- The so-called <u>orthodox adapter</u> holds his own tradition and understanding of a unique truth to be central and feels responsible for the continuity of his religious system. He or she is often motivated by the religious essence of his or her religion and the will for reconciliation.
- Finally, Rötting identifies the ideal type of the <u>cultural-harmonizer</u>. The IRD practitioners of this type feel responsible with a high historical awareness for conflict solving within a societal dimension. He or she is motivated by reconciliation as well as by improving the image of his or her religious tradition.

These findings are then related to subcategories of Christian-Muslim dialogue, Christian-Jewish dialogue, Jewish-Muslim and Christian-Buddhist dialogue, the so-called "Abrahamic dialogue" as well as to the dialogue with minor religious traditions and organizations, etc. Rötting exemplifies which type of dialogue a person engages more frequently according to those subcategories, special formats or themes of dialogue.

The vital criteria for this taxonomy is the motivation drawn from biographical interviews and how the respective motivation to engage in interreligious learning relates to what Rötting describes as the four dimensional spaces of society, dynamics, the other, and one's own religion.

In order to do so, Rötting makes a distinction between two basic groups of motivation: contemplative and active motivations. These groups range from the wish to build on one's own identify, way of life, self-affirmation, and self-realization, to the more "active" intention to reconcile, to integrate other worldviews or realize one's own religious tradition, practices and ethics in the public sphere. To give but a few examples: The motivation for identity building relates to the dimension of one's own religion, the motivation to work on one's way of life to the pole of dynamics, or the motivation to realize one's religious ethical convictions to society.

These final remarks establish a link to the third exemplary study that will be presented in this paper.

3.3. Simone Sinn: *Religious Pluralism in the Making*

To put it into a nutshell, the work of Simone Sinn provides new insights to these discussions in question in three ways: First, by her analysis of theological publications and guided expert interviews that highlight categories and narratives with a formative influence on the understanding of religious pluralism understood in a much more general

way as a socio-political framework. Second, by the focus of her analyses on the situation in Indonesia. Third, by Sinn's explicit link between empirical analyses and theological debates. Sinn is a protestant theologian and pastor. For several years now she has worked in Geneva at the Lutheran World Federation as theological advisor for interreligious relations and frequently publishes in this function.[15] She has great experience in interreligious dialogue settings and consultancies on a global level with the Christian churches, denominations, and other religions, especially Muslim organizations. Along those lines, the following considerations focus on her PhD in theology that has been accomplished in the Program of Excellence "Religion and Politics" at the University of Muenster.

Sinn's book on religious pluralism is based on a careful and thorough survey of sociological and political science literature on civil religion and politics in Indonesia. Against this background, Sinn reconstructs the history of the present relationship between the post-Suharto regime and the religious institutions as well as its role in Indonesian society and academia. Sinn approaches her field of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Indonesia with discourse theory in the tradition of Michel Foucault and the sociology of knowledge (Alfred Schütz). Accordingly, "religious pluralism" is considered as a (negatively denoted) concept in an emic discourse as well as the normative negotiation of influence within the field of plural and diverse religions (2014: 80).

Against this background, the interview-analyses aim to reconstruct mental schemes and action patterns of Christian and Muslim theologians' understandings of religious pluralism. Sinn therefore does not ask for explicit conceptual definitions of religious pluralism but for self-perception of the situation as well as the perception of other religions under conditions of pluralism and the post-Suharto religion legislation. In this respect, religious organizations in Indonesia are located in a public discursive field of civil society between political ethics (religious legislation) and theology of religions. Sinn has been focusing on the scope of action towards pluralism and the resources for action in this field.

With regard to the present discussions, chapter 4 of Sinn's PhD dissertation is of particular interest. Whereas chapter 4.3 represents values and motivations of theologians who are engaged in interreligious dialogue (comparable to the procedure of Rötting), chapter 4.4 comes up with four subcategories of discourses on religious pluralism at Indonesian universities. On this basis, religious pluralism is characterized by multiple overlapping discursive topics like conflict, citizenship, diversity (or anti-discrimination), proportionality and then their critical interrelation:

- The <u>religious conflict discourse</u> claims for clear boundary work between religious groups and a strong state position to organize pluralism. It sees religious

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[15] For example: Simone Sinn, ed., *Deepening Faith, Hope and Love in Relations with Neighbors of Other Faiths* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2008); or Simone Sinn, Mouhanad Khorchide, and Dina El Omari, *Religious Plurality and the Public Space: Joint Christian - Muslim Theological Reflections.* Evangelische Verlagsanstalt (November 2014).

institutions as self-interested striving for domination. Pluralism is favored less as interreligious relations and more as multi-religiosity that guarantees each religion its secure space.

- The <u>diversity discourse on religion</u> sees – according to Sinn – peaceful cooperation as the natural state and inner responsibility and task of religious institutions in education and culture activity. Diversity in this discourse is regarded as an integral feature of identity and essential in Indonesian history. Otherness in the framework of this discourse is not imagined and felt as extraordinary, fascinating or threating but as normal neighborhood.
- The <u>discourse on citizenship</u> is concerned about civil rights and legal protection of the (religious) minority. Starting points are often cases of discrimination towards minorities in the educational system or concerning construction projects. The *pancasila*-discourse only legitimates some religions so that this framework is not sufficient for every situation in the religious plural field of Indonesia.
- The <u>proportionality discourse</u> takes into account the difference between the religions in numbers of adherents. Large religions are said to have more responsibility to influence the society than smaller ones. Representational institutions in the regional administrations have been implemented in recent years that mirror in their composition the numerical size of religions and contributed to the proportionality-mental model.

Along those lines, the qualitative and hermeneutical work of Sinn clearly demonstrates how religious pluralism is the outcome of societal and theological negotiation processes in a specific national environment. Especially elite agents/experts influence the modeling of pluralism. The religious freedom discourse states the right of the member strongest religion to be more dominant and uphold the duty to take over responsibilities for public welfare.

In this context, Sinn underlines that religious elites think of dialogue as a means of strengthening connective and stabilizing societal forces. Sinn's work concludes therefore with theological-anthropological considerations on optional vulnerability in interreligious dialogue in Indonesia and two basic ways of dealing with vulnerability: segregation or solidarity.

This leads back to the initial question to what extent sociological studies of IRD might add an interesting new dimension to IRD research in general.

4. Conclusion
As has already been alluded to at the end of the introduction, the present article seeks to argue that the analyses of Gritt Klinkhammer et al., Martin Rötting, and Simone Sinn provide two interconnected lines of clarification for recent discussions of IRD activities in Germany and beyond. In order to make this point, it is at first helpful to

systematize some of the central findings that have been carved out by the three studies in question:

First of all, all the presented analyses were highlighting the diversity that dominates the field of IRD-activities. Coming from very different angles, the three authors finally arrived at very differentiated typologies that underline the different aims (Klinkhammer et al.), individual motives (Rötting) as well as the embeddedness of IRD activities in wider socio-cultural discourses (Sinn). Taken together, this type of empirical research illustrates that IRD activities are very heterogeneous; they can be based upon very different rationales.

The three analyses do not, however, stop at this point. Especially the analyses of Klinkhammer et al. and Rötting, they have made it very clear that these different types of IRD activities have a significant influence on (a) the content of the respective activities as well as (b) their social significance. 'Cultural harmonizers' and 'humanitarian agents' (Rötting), for example, follow very different approaches to religious traditions; and the ideal type of 'empowerment' stands for an approach to the wider society that is distinct from e.g. 'theological debates' (Klinkhammer et al.).

On this basis, Sinn's analyses add yet another layer of complexity that is of high significance for the following considerations. Every analysis of IRD activities has to take the socio-cultural context of those activities into consideration. Of course, they are – from the point of view of sociological analysis – not independent from political or economic developments. In addition, it is, however, also important to take the general discourses on religious plurality and religious pluralism (Sinn) as well as the general role of religion in society (Klinkhammer et al.) into consideration in order to properly assess the role of IRD in a given society.

Having said all this, it is finally possible to come back to the two themes formulated in the introduction.

(1) In the debates on interreligious dialogue, the category of religion is constructed in a particularly ambiguous way. The analyses underline the intrinsic plurality of interreligious dialogue activities. IRD must not be reduced to the classical triangle of Christian-Muslim-Jewish dialogue. It is based upon a plural field of highly diverse worldviews and manifold levels of normative influences on important issue—as, for example, the integration of modern societies and their reactions to religious plurality. Under these conditions, the presented analyses highlight the social constructedness of the notion of 'religion' through scholars and IRD-agents. In addition, they suggest that these constructions of 'religion' correspond with different types of agents and their view on the negotiability of religious topics.

(2) The idea of a 'secular world' for the understanding of interreligious dialogue activities is, at least, as important as the notion of 'religious pluralism.' As far as this theme is concerned, the above analyses actually distinguish two dimensions: On the

one hand, they show to what an extent IRD has developed as a response to secularization processes. On the other hand, they underline that IRD has – even among 'secular minded' agents – developed into an important factor for integration politics and societal justice. It would be naïve to think that this socio-cultural framing would be without impact on IRD activities.

These two themes have an immediate impact on the more general debates on IRD in as far as they highlight the plurality of these activities beyond mere theological reflections. The present article wants to introduce this point of view into the debates and encourage further analyses along those lines.

Karsten Lehmann is a sociologist as well as scholar of religions. He received his PhD (Sociology) from the University of Tübingen and his Habilitation on Religious NGOs in the context of the UN (Academic Study of Religions) from the University of Bayreuth (to be published with Routledge in 2015). Lehmann is an expert in qualitative research methods, the role of international religious NGOs as well as the ways to deal with present-day religious pluralism in Europe. At the moment, he works as Head of Social Sciences and Statistics at the KAICIID Research Department in Vienna/Austria. In this position, he is coordinating the overall Peace Mapping Programme with a specific focus on the qualitative analyses linked to Case Studies as well as what the project calls "Voices from the Field." In addition, Lehmann has been conceptualizing and coordinating a number of further projects inside KAICIID, such as the Talking Dialogue/TD project or the international Dialogue beyond Dialogue/DbeD conference – the results of these projects are about to be published later this year.

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Ritual Preparation for Artistic Production:
The Spiritual Aesthetics of Spiritual Ascetics in the Abrahamic Faiths
By Peter Schadler

Abstract: While considerable research has gone into the Abrahamic faiths and their art, almost none has explored links among artisans in spiritual preparation for their artistic endeavors. This paper considers such links as may be found in ascetic practices of artisans, scribes, and craftsmen in preparation for their endeavors and the beliefs that such practices might impose on their future project, as well as divergences within those practices across the Abrahamic faiths. It is argued that in each of these faith traditions the customs and ascetic practices associated with particular artistic productions only follow the development of doctrinal rubrics and technical artistic requirements established by the receiving faith community by a considerable length of time; practical production and the doctrinal assessment of that production's technical aspects preceded efforts to control how the item was produced, and by whom.

The following serves as a preliminary to further much needed investigations into a host of related issues bearing on the ascetic practices of artisans, scribes and craftsmen of the Abrahamic traditions in preparation for their sacred and artistic endeavors. Indeed, these clearly deserve to be independent research areas, each with their own set of unique approaches. The theologies governing the three religious communities affect questions of what constitutes 'artistic' production on the one hand or 'sacred' production on the other, in which contexts these overlap, and so forth. A number of categorical divisions need establishment before a full comparative study can be undertaken.[1] Nevertheless, the origins of ascetic practices in preparation for either artistic or sacred art production with regard to all three faith traditions has received such scant attention that initial research yields immediate results.[2]

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[1] Questions about what kind of work counts as 'art' vs. 'sacred transcription', whether an artifact can be thought to participate in both categories, and whether these categories can be conceived of across religious boundaries all complicate any careful comparative study, some of which will be made obvious by what I say here. To give one example, the fact that Jews and Muslims have from a very early period in their faith traditions' histories guarded their sacred books and often refused to allow non-Jews or -Muslims from copying those texts, while Christians on the whole did not, already betrays a crucial difference in how these related faith communities perceived of their written texts. For the sanctity of the text in the Jewish tradition, see E. Tov, 'The Scribal and Textual Transmission of the Torah Analyzed in Light of Its Sanctity', in A. Moriya and G. Hata (eds.), *Pentateuchal Traditions in the Late Second Temple Period: Proceedings of the International Workshop in Tokyo, August 28-31, 2007* (Brill, 2012), pp. 57-72. For the sanctity of the text in the Muslim tradition, see T. Zadeh, 'Touching and Ingesting: Early Debates over the Material Qur'an', *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 129.3 (2009), pp. 443-66. For the quick pace with which Christians abandoned the scroll in favor of the codex, a format usually reserved for works of lesser import, see F. M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[2] Interestingly, some work has been undertaken as regards ascetic scribal practices among Buddhist monks of Japan. See B. D. Lowe, 'The Discipline of Writing: Scribes and Purity in Eighth-Century Japan', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies,* 39.2 (2012), pp. 201-39.

In the main, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions concerned with the purity of the producer of sacred art in preparation for artistic endeavor arise on the popular level, and little documentary evidence from official or canonical sources testify to supposed needs for such practices, though there is material in more popular and deutero-canonical sources. Further, in considering the sources in these three religious traditions together, an interesting and important 'coincidence' emerges. Clear articulations of concerns for the purity of the practitioner, and his or her associated ascetic practices in preparation for artistic or sacred material production, emerge in our sources only centuries after concern for the technical accuracy of their correlative artistic products, despite what some of the later sources might have us believe.

For the great majority of artistic activities stemming from these three faiths plentiful examples exist of artisanal borrowing for the production of artifacts in each other's traditions. Early Arabic traditions have the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid (668-715) writing to the Byzantine emperor and even threatening him if he would not deploy Christian craftsmen to help build and design two of the world's oldest mosques, the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and the Prophet's Mosque of Medina, while the famous tenth-century Mosque of Cordoba was, at the request of Abd al-Rahman III, completed with the aid of craftsmen sent by the Byzantine Emperor as well.[3] One of perhaps only three surviving synagogues from Medieval Spain, the Synagogue *El Transito*, which was built on the order of Samuel ha-Levi in the 14th century, contains inscriptions from the Qur'an, strongly suggesting, if not proving, the participation of Muslim craftsmen in its construction.[4] Meanwhile it has recently been shown that copyists of early New Testament manuscripts were certainly not always 'vetted' for professional accuracy, and their confessional credentials have similarly been rightly questioned.[5]

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[3] For a summary of the sources for the tradition, see H. A. R. Gibb, 'Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 12 (1958), pp. 221-33. There has lately been some discussion regarding the authenticity of the sources. For my purposes here, however, it is enough that the tradition developed among Muslims that the Caliph asked for Byzantine craftsmen to help in the building of these two mosques, and that this was not seen as offensive by many Muslims. Sauvaget offers some examples of traditions in which mosque decoration by infidels is said to be forbidden, but Gibb rejoins how minor a tradition this must have been since the sources reveal no resentment to al-Walid's initiative. J. Sauvaget, *Les mosquée omeyyade de Médine: études sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée de de la basilique* (Van Oest, 1947), pp. 111-12. For the mosque at Cordoba, see H. Stern, *Les Mosaïques de la Grand Mosquée de Cordoue* (Madrider Forschungen, 1976).

[4] The first person to remark on this in more than passing appears to have been Jerrilynn Dodds. Since then, several others have referenced this peculiarity in passing puzzlement, but to date no one has offered a convincing explanation. See J. D. Dodds, 'Mudejar Tradition and the Synagogues of Medieval Spain: Cultural Identity and Cultural Hegemony', in V. B. Mann, T. F. Glick, and J. D. Dodds (eds.), *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain* (George Braziller and The Jewish Museum, 1992), pp. 113-31, for the initial reference, and J. Ray, *The Jew in Medieval Iberia: 1100-1500* (Brill, 2011), p. 39 for further bibliography.

[5] Aland speculated that the author of Papyrus 66, a near complete Greek codex of the Gospel of John from the second century was copied in a non-Christian Scriptorium. While this has been disputed by Royse, it remains reasonable among scholars in the field that other early manuscripts of the New Testament found non-Christian copyists. It has also been argued that the copyist of one of the earliest Latin manuscripts of the Bible was copied by a pagan. On this issue, see J. R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Brill,

Thus in certain fields of artistry and craftsmanship, the borrowing of artisans and craftsmen does not raise concern in either typical canonical sources, or in general, more popular ones. However, the three traditions have sought to place limitations on the purity of their artists in a few specific areas. Jews have sought first and foremost to limit the identity of scribes who copy the Torah, and processes by which they work. Muslims have exerted control over both who could teach and practice the sacred art of calligraphy, and who could write a Qur'an, while Christians have tried to limit who could paint icons. That inscribing the Qur'an finds its proper analogue in the Christian iconographic tradition has been noticed before, but largely to focus on technical skills needed for the exercise, and in how the products themselves were received by the faithful.[6]

It was in these three religious types of productions that the most stringent efforts since the medieval period were made to control both the confessional identity of the practitioner, and his or her discipline, and so in these I will concentrate my analysis. Nevertheless, in at least the cases of Jewish and Muslim scribes, it must be admitted that sources stemming from high places of religious authority in those respective traditions could permit exceptions to the normative central requirements that a Jew write a Torah, and that a Muslim teach the art of calligraphy.[7]

Judaism

The first work of which we are aware to systematically document the regulation of Jewish scribal practices is the text of the *Masseketh Soferim* or *Hilkoth Soferim.*[8] This work is usually found in the manuscript tradition bundled in with a group of texts known as the *Massektoth Ketanoth* or "Minor Tractates of the Talmud."[9] In all cases scholars agree that the *Soferim* was compiled sometime after the final redaction of the Babylonian Talmud in the eighth century CE and outside of that canon, reproducing *Talmudic* traditions.[10] Most of the *Soferim* is concerned with the writing implements, preparation of the paper, ink, etc. One rule, however, sticks out in an effort to cover all questions regarding the identity of the scribe. Rule 13 of the first chapter reads: "A scroll of the Torah that was written by a Sadducee, an informer, a proselyte, a slave, a woman, a madman or a minor may not be

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2008), pp. 399-544. More generally, and supporting the view that Christians generally employed Christians to copy Christian texts, see K. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters : Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

[6] A. Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (NYU Press, 1984), pp. 83-84.

[7] See further below for examples.

[8] For a modern English translation, see A. Cohen (ed.), *Minor Tractates of the Talmud* 2 vols. (Soncino Press, 1965), pp. 211-324.

[9] Scholars have traditionally given the eighth century CE as a date for this text, and locate its origins in either Babylon or Palestine. However, more recently it has been suggested that the first nine chapters of this work were written in Europe, and that perhaps the whole of the work belongs to a later period, reproducing, of course, earlier traditions from the Talmud. See D. R. Blank, 'It's Time to Take Another Look at "Our Little Sister" Soferim: A Bibliographical Essay', *Jewish Quarterly Review,* 90.1-2 (1999), pp. 1-26.

[10] Ibid. See also the introduction to the text in Cohen (ed.), *Minor Tractates of the Talmud* .

used for the lection. This is the rule: Whosoever cannot act in religious matters on behalf of the public is not permitted to write a scroll of the Torah."[11]

What is interesting about this passage, apart from the fact that it limits the confessional identity of a scribe of Torah for use in worship, is that it adumbrates material in the *Talmud* dealing with similar issues, while at the same time adding further categories of limitation. Here, the passage being summarized is from the tractate *Gittin,* a book largely dealing with the nature of documents and divorce. The *Talmud*, as it does so often, reports in *Gittin* a number of rabbinic traditions seemingly at odds with each other and interprets each in such a way as to harmonize the opinions of the Rabbis.[12] Here, the redactors of the *Mishnah* worked on the subject of those from whom scrolls of the law should be purchased and what their relative value is. In the course of producing their opinions, however, the rabbis debate the conditions in which a heathen may write a scroll on the one hand and/or under what conditions such a scroll may be read by a member of the community on the other. Removing further in time, nothing or perhaps nearly nothing unambiguously referring to the copying of the Torah is found in the Scriptures themselves. To be fair, it is often claimed that the reason early sources do not address questions found in later answers is that many of the traditions articulated in a later period were taken for granted in earlier periods. Yet, if this were simply so in this case, one would expect the *Soferim* to articulate more specifically, not less specifically in into which category the heathen falls, and why, under what specific circumstances a heathen could copy a scroll, etc. Instead, the heathen is altogether excluded by virtue of the fact that he is not able to act in religious matters on behalf of the public, and therefore according to the rule forbidden from writing a scroll. Another tradition on which one might dwell is the *mikveh* or ritual bath. *Soferim* makes no mention of the use or need for a *mikveh* at any stage of the scribal process, whereas later traditions require a *mikveh* either prior to writing the Torah, or at each inscription of the name of God, or both.[13]

Christianity

As I noted above, Christians seem to have been the least concerned of the three Abrahamic traditions to safeguard the confessional identity and purity of their scribes. Such was not the case, however, when it came to their images. The eighth century witnessed the Iconoclast Controversy in the East Roman Empire, initiating the first sustained treatises on the nature of the image. Here, however, the question of the *status* of the image was under consideration, and not the painter who painted it, and how he

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[11] Cohen (ed.), *Minor Tractates of the Talmud*, p. 216.

[12] B. Gittin 45b.

[13] While the *mikveh* certainly does feature in the Talmud, it does not appear in *Soferim.* I have not had an exhaustive search of the Talmud to see if there are passages linking the *mikveh* to scribal activity. One place where these two are clearly married is in the work *Kesset HaSofer*, a primer for scribes written by Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried in the 19th century. There, he reports that some scribes do not write the name of god unless they are in a state of purity and that others leave all of the spaces where they would write the name of god blank, immersing in the *mikveh* before filling in the name throughout the manuscript (ch. 10.18) See http://www.hasoferet.com/halakha-for-scribes/keset-ha-sofer/.

prepared for his craft. Interest in such questions as those came forth very slowly. Our earliest manuals dedicated to the work of craftsmen focus on technique, materials, colors, and so forth. Theophilus' tripartite manual on painting, the production of stained glass, and techniques for metalwork dates from the early 12th century, but we receive only hints of concern for prayer as it might be attached to the crafts.[14] *The Hermeneia,* an icon painter's manual written by Dionysius of Fourna between 1730-34 offers more material for consideration, and supplies specific prayers to be said before engaging in one's craft. It does not, however, go into much detail regarding the need for purity in the icon painter.[15] Additionally, it has recently been shown that Latin Christian theologians working in the Carolingian court, while in general agreement with their Greek-speaking coreligionists regarding the theology of images, did not enter into ontological discussion of the image or its justification in the eighth and ninth centuries, and only partly began to think in special terms about the cross in the ninth.[16]

Only in the 16th century, and in Russia, was the purity of the painter brought into question.[17] There, at the Council of Stoglav, several chapters were devoted to establishing the need for purity in the iconographer. Chapter 43 is the most often cited, and with good reason:

> It is fitting for a painter of icons to be humble and meek, and reverent, and not given to idle talk or laughter, nor to be quarrelsome, nor envious, nor a drunkard or murderer, but in all things to keep spiritual and corporeal purity with all caution…and to come to his spiritual fathers frequently for confession and in all things to be forthcoming, and thus act according to their instruction and teaching, to participate in fasting and prayer, and avoiding all shame and unruliness…[18]

The chapter goes on to further regulate and guard the purity of the iconographer in all his work, going even so far as to stipulate under what conditions he should be removed from his craft, and why. Less than another century would go by before a list of prescribed prayers and rules were produced by the Stroganov school for icon painters, in which the iconographer is told of how to pray while he works, how to keep silence, to whom to offer

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[14] Theophilus, *On Divers Arts*, trans. J. G. Hathorne and C. S. Smith (University of Chicago Press, 1963). See now also a recently discovered early Byzantine painter's manual dating to ca. 1355, which is, again, concerned primarily with technique. G. Parpulov, I. V. Dolgikh, and P. Cowe, 'A Byzantine Text on the Technique of Icon Painting', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 64 (2010), pp. 201-16.

[15] Dionysius of Fourna, *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna*, trans. P. Hetherington (Oakwood Publications, 1974).

[16] See T. F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 366-70.

[17] See further below for analysis of sources that point to earlier possibilities.

[18] I thank Professor Jack Haney for translating the Russian text of chapter 43 that I have used here. For a French translation of the same, see *Le Stoglav ou les Cent chapitres: recuil des décisions de l'assemblée ecclésiastique de Moscou, 1551*, trans. E. Duchesne (Édouard Champion, 1920).

prayer (the saint an iconographer is painting is usual), and how to ask the Lord's help in determining how next to proceed with his icon.[19] By the eighteenth century at the latest, the connection of the iconographer's purity to his craft had made its way to Greece (if indeed it had not started there). In the *Synaxaria* compiled by Nicodemus the Hagiorite (1749-1809), we find the tradition that Lazaros Zographos, a ninth-century iconographer, persevered in "asceticism and prayer so as to prepare himself to transcribe his inner contemplation onto the images that he painted…"[20] Though it is not likely this tradition predates Nicodemus, it remains possible, as always, that traditions linking the iconographer's inner state to his iconographic production are much older.[21] Nonetheless, even presupposing a much earlier date for the generation of such traditions, their total absence from the early works of John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite strongly suggest that at that time the purity of the iconographer was of considerably less concern than it would be several hundred years later in Moscow.

Islam

As in the case with Judaism, Islam is traditionally aniconic, even if multiple exceptions exist in both traditions. This has led to an increased focus on the ornamentation of the Qur'an in Islamic tradition, and along with that, traditions involving the sanctity of the art of calligraphy and the preparation of the scribe needed in order to properly undertake the task of writing a Qur'an. Here again, however, we will need to wait several centuries before the most elaborate traditions concerning the purity of the calligrapher are expressed. Instead, the earliest traditions again focus on the technical aspects of calligraphy and Qur'an inscription. The kinds of materials used to write the Qur'an, what kind of script is used, how to prepare the pen and ink, and so forth all witness to early concerns for the technical accuracy of the craft.[22]

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[19] These rules were first printed in Russian as the *Stroganov Figurative Iconographic Patternbook* from a single manuscript, now lost, in 1869. It is thought, on limited grounds, that the Patternbook must date to prior to 1606, when the patron saint of the Stroganovs, Tsarevich Saint Dmitri, was canonized, as he does not appear in the book. A date in the early 17th century is not unreasonable, although one as late as the 19th century cannot be ruled out either. See C. P. Kelley (ed.), *An Iconographers Patternbook: The Stroganov Tradition*, trans. C. P. Kelley (Oakwood Publications, 1992), p. ix. For the list of rules for the Iconographer, see p. iv.

[20] English translation taken from S. Bigham (ed.), *Heroes of the Icon* (SVS Press, 1998), p. 88.

[21] I could not find such a tradition attributed to Lazaros, however, in the earliest witnesses to his life, the tenth century *Synaxarion* of Constantinople, or the eleventh-century collection modern Byzantinists refer to as *Theophanes Continuatus*. Similarly, the tradition cited by Tarasov that Isidore of Pelusium (fl. 4th century) wrote a letter to Eusebius in which he wrote that the painter should be pure and live a spiritual life with good morals, and that paintings "painted by the hands of unbelievers should not be accepted…" is of questionable authenticity. Tarasov does not cite where she found the letter in question, and I have been unable to find it thus far. There are over 2000 letters ascribed to Isidore, but the authenticity of some of these is in question. I am skeptical, however, that such a detailed concern for the purity of the painter would be exhibited at so early a date as Isidore. For the reference to the letter in Tarasov, see O. Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion: Sacred Spaces in Imperial Russia*, trans. R. Milner-Gulland (Reaktion Books, 2002), pp. 173-74 and 78.

[22] For an excellent introduction to these topics, see the recent work N. Mansour, *Sacred Script: Muhaqqaq in Islamic Calligraphy* (I. B. Tauris, 2011), which focuses on the sanctity of writing itself, and the associated script.

The *Fihrist* written by Ibn al-Nadim (d. c. 995) makes the case in point. Ibn al-Nadim, who penned a bibliography of all books of which he knew written before the end of the tenth century CE, devotes an entire chapter to language and calligraphy, which scarcely touches on the qualities of the calligraphers themselves.[23] Even so, from him we get indications that handwriting will become closely linked to the purity of the scribe. In a minor section on the Excellencies of Penmanship, we find the following two quotations: "Euclid (Aqlīdus) said, 'Handwriting is a spiritual designing, even though it appears by means of a material instrument... Al-*Naẓẓām* said, 'Handwriting is rooted in the spirit, even though it appears by means of bodily senses.'"[24]

Yet in the 16th and 17th centuries we hear the most profound connections made between the calligrapher and his sanctity. The Persian poet and author Qāḍī Aḥmad ibn Mīr-Munshī (d. c. 1606) wrote a work on Calligraphers in which he outlined his own path to improving in the art. At one point, he highlights how he became a calligrapher, and his ascetic practices necessary to improve in calligraphy:

After I had left the madrasa
None saw me return there.
I ensconced myself in a corner of my home.
And from the burning of my breast spoke thus to my wounded heart:
"O my heart! It is better either to say 'farewell' to writing,
"And to wash the traces of script off the tablet fo the heart,
"Or to write in a way that people should talk of it
"And entreat me for every letter."
Then I settled down in complete earnest and zeal,
In short, all day till nightfall,
Like a *qalam*, I girt my loins for practice,
Sitting on my heels.
I withdrew from friends, relations and companions
And finally received encouragement...[25]

He went on to write of fasting and other exercises undertaken to bring his writing into greater purity. He was followed in this tradition by another Persian author of the 17th century, Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī, who wrote a treatise called Ādāb al-mashq, which means, "Manners of Practice," in which he appears to be writing specifically to the novice

[23] *The Fihrist of al-Nadïm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, trans. B. Dodge (Columbia University Press, 1970).
[24] *Fihrist of al-Nadim*, pp. 19-20.
[25] T. Minorsky (ed.), *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qāḍī Aḥmad ibn Mīr-Munshī* (Smithonian Institution, 1959), p. 111.

calligrapher.[26] He encouraged the calligrapher to pray for the benefit of the author, and according to Ernst, pays an unusual amount of attention to the need for inner concentration in order to achieve excellence in writing.[27]

In all three of these religious traditions, the sacred work of the practitioner follows a similar path: production of his artifact, followed by debate, discussion, and doctrinal articulation of the sanctity of the artifact by his co-religionists, only followed much later by the accompanying concerns for the production of the artifact, and whether the state of the producer has any effect on the sanctity of the artifact itself. The expression, "purity of writing is purity of the soul" was not seen until Qāḍī Aḥmad in the 16th century, and likewise in the case of Christianity and Judaism, the connection drawn between the product and its constituent producer took a far longer time to draw than did the one between the product and the faithful receivers of that product.

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Seeing the things you cannot see: (Dis)-solving the sublime in interreligious aesthetics through the paintings of Hiroshi Senju
By Peter L. Doebler

> *The painter is as far from despair as from self-importance, and one must wish for humanity many persons who, like him, contemplate the world with solidarity and transform it.*
>
> *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

Abstract:
This paper examines the artwork of the contemporary Japanese painter Hiroshi Senju as a vehicle to explore how fissures within a religio-aesthetic concept like the sublime can provide productive openings for interreligious engagement. A focused study of Senju's installation at the Shofuso Japanese House outside Philadelphia serves as a lens to view two different responses to the antagonistic excesses of the Western sublime, one from Japanese and Buddhist aesthetics and the other from Christian aesthetics. Considering further how Senju's art mediates these two different perspectives, the paper claims that it provides a unique response to the problematics of the sublime, a response that envisions a peaceful sublime that sustains a participative relationship.

Introduction

The waterfall paintings of the contemporary Japanese artist Hiroshi Senju[1] are enigmas because they create sound, but the sound is silence; they generate movement, but the movement is stillness. Like champagne they simultaneously refresh and intoxicate, stimulate and subdue with a feeling of weightlessness. They are both ravishingly beautiful and disembowlingly sublime. But wait. Beautiful *and* sublime? Can these coexist?

In what follows I will use the artwork of Hiroshi Senju as a vehicle to explore how fissures within a traditional religio-aesthetic concept like the sublime can provide productive openings for interreligious engagement. First, I will introduce Senju's artwork, suggesting that it evokes a unique experience of depth. Next, I will amplify this idea of depth by drawing on the Japanese aesthetic concept of *yūgen*, specifically noting its relation to the sublime. Third, I will discuss recent critiques of the sublime from within Christian theological aesthetics. Finally, I will consider how Senju's art complements these two different perspectives and provides a unique response to the problematics of the sublime, a response that envisions a sublime that sustains a peaceful, harmonious depth.

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[1] Regarding the order of Japanese names, I have written Hiroshi Senju's name throughout in the English order because his personal webpage uses this order. For works cited, if the work was written in English I have used the English order. If a work was translated from the Japanese I have retained the Japanese order.

Discovering Depth in the Art of Hiroshi Senju

The breakout point in Senju's career was receiving the Honorable Mention prize at the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995.[2] The prize was for his massive work *The Fall*, one of the earliest iterations of what has become a consistent subject of his work up to the present, indeed the subject Senju is perhaps best known for. Senju paints his waterfalls by pouring white paint down the surface from the top and then airbrushing.

One notable feature of Senju's body of work is that it often goes beyond the boundaries of art galleries or museums. Senju has carried out commissions for numerous installations in both public and private settings. These included the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Tokyo (2001), the Tokyo Haneda Airport (2004), the Daitokuji Temple in Kyoto (2005), and the Shofuso Japanese House in Philadelphia's West Fairmont Park (**Fig. 1**).[3] Here I will focus on Shofuso.

Installed in 2007, there are twenty screens on traditional Japanese sliding doors, laid out in two rooms. Senju named the larger room "Imagination of Dynamics" (**Fig. 2**) and the smaller room "Imagination of Silence" (**Fig. 3**).[4] These suggestive names are reflected in the ways Senju uses color and line differently in each room. Overall, "Imagination of Dynamics" is much lighter than "Imagination of Silence"; it has fewer dark sections and the succession of horizontal streams all the way across gives the room a lightness and verticality. In contrast, "Imagination of Silence" is more varied in its use of color and line. Dark tones are more evident, giving the room a deep, somber feeling. Furthermore, the use of diagonal lines formed by the rising mist creates a different kind of movement, still vertical but more focused on the solid shaft of white that stands out vividly from the surrounding darkness. Combined, the rooms generate a complexity, a complimentary movement and stillness that evokes a profound depth that is both spatial and emotive.

This feeling of depth is further compounded through the material support of the paintings, the fact that rather than being on a framed canvas hung in an interior room, these paintings are mobile on sliding doors. This puts in motion two kinds of relationships. (**Fig. 4**) First, since the doors can be opened to the outside directly, this creates a permeable space between outer and inner. Therefore, changes in the weather and light, depending on the time of day and season, will affect how the waterfalls appear, thus creating new paintings at any moment. Second, since the doors slide rather than turn on hinges, they open on a smooth continuum. In this way you can see the paintings in the

[2] Examples of this and other works by Senju mentioned below can be viewed at the artist's website at http://www.hiroshisenju.com/exhibitions.

[3] More information on the Shofuso Japanese House can be found at the organization's website http://www.japanesehouse.org. I wish to thank Shofuso for their kind permission to reproduce photos of Senju's paintings.

[4] See Yuichi Ozawa, *Story of Shofuso: A Cultural Bridge between Japan and the United States* (Philadelphia: Friends of the Japanese House and Garden, 2010), 47.

adjacent room in a variety of ways, so, there are in fact numerous paintings between the rooms. This ability to activate multiple visual planes that expand and contract accentuates a shifting feeling of depth.

Expanding Depth in the Japanese Aesthetics of *Yūgen*

When we look at concepts in Japanese aesthetics for some explanation for the depth evoked by Senju's waterfall paintings, one of the most suggestive is *yūgen*. Approached etymologically, *yūgen* (幽玄) is made up of two components: *yū* and *gen*. Discussing these, literary scholar Makoto Ueda notes that "*yū* means deep, dim, or difficult to see, and that *gen*, originally describing the dark, profound, tranquil color of the universe, refers to the Taoist concept of truth."[5] Together then, the word suggests a mysterious, obscure depth.

Yūgen became a prominent aesthetic value in the twelfth century when *waka* poets employed the term in their criticism, *waka* being a traditional poetic form composed of thirty-one syllables divided into five lines (5-7-5-7-7). In particular, it was the prominent poet Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204) who set forth *yūgen* as the aesthetic ideal of a *waka* poem. Shunzei drew on Tendai Buddhist thought, including the practice of *shikan* meditation, a contemplation that stills the mind, takes in all things without discrimination, and becomes aware of the fundamental interdependence of all things.[6] *Yūgen* names this feeling of awareness that a poem evokes.

Surveying the literature of this period, the twentieth century Japanese aesthetician Ōnishi Yoshinori summarizes *yūgen* as a mysterious depth that has a certain fullness or heaviness. The basis of this depth is a profound experience of pure existence where "the immediate wholeness of being is recalled in a split second…."[7] This description of pure experience as awareness of fundamental interrelatedness links Ōnishi with Shunzei and *shikan* contemplation.

What is especially relevant for our discussion is that Ōnishi compares *yūgen* with the Western sublime as part of an attempt to discover a universal category of the sublime. For Ōnishi, the sublime is generally motivated by the greatness of nature, but in the West it tends towards the tragic while in the East it tends towards *yūgen*. And these differences can to some extent be predicated on different attitudes towards nature. This can be seen in a contrast between Ōnishi and Immanuel Kant made by Makoto Ueda: "…whereas the German philosopher stressed the resistance of human reason against nature's overwhelming force, the Japanese scholar wants to emphasize man's love for and harmony

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[5] Makoto Ueda, "Zeami and the Art of *Nō* Drama: Imitation, *Yūgen*, and Sublimity," *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Nancy Hume (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 182.

[6] See William LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 88.

[7] Ōnishi Yoshinori, *Bigaku* [Aesthetics], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1959–60), 234. The translation is my own.

with nature. He believes that sublime beauty arises when the artist faces nature not as an enemy to conquer but as an object of aesthetic contemplation, an object with which he ultimately entrusts his soul."[8]

Preserving Depth in Theological Aesthetic Critiques of the Sublime

This hint of an antagonism at the heart of the Western sublime noted by Ueda is made explicit in recent critiques of the concept by theologians such as John Milbank, David Bentley Hart, Graham Ward, and John Betz, among others.[9] This cluster of theological approaches has identified ontological problems in the sublime, arguing that the modern division between beauty and the sublime expresses a view of reality that is at root, violent. At the same time, they offer constructive proposals that advocate for the interrelation of beauty and the sublime rooted in Christian notions of trinity, incarnation, and the analogy of being.

These critiques generally are united in reading the sublime in its modern and postmodern manifestations—paradigmatically in Immanuel Kant and Jean-François Lyotard—as two sides of the same coin, as ultimately a mistaken, hollow, and possibly destructive attempt to maintain a sense of immanent transcendence. The only difference, as John Betz notes, is that "…modern philosophy tends to construe the sublime in terms of an ultimate presence and identity…whereas postmodern philosophy construes the sublime in terms of an ultimate absence and difference…. In either case, however, the beauty of being disappears, because it is ultimately an illusion—either of the One (or Absolute) or of Nothing at all."[10]

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[8] Makoto Ueda, "*Yūgen* and *Erhabene*: Ōnishi Yoshinori's Attempt to Synthesize Japanese and Western Aesthetics," in *Culture and Identity: Japanese Intellectuals During the Interwar Years*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 293.

[9] See John Milbank, "Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent," in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, ed. Regina Schwartz (London: Routledge, 2004), 211–234; Graham Ward, "Transcendence and Representation," in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, ed. Regina Schwartz (London: Routledge, 2004), 127–145; David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004), 43–93; and John R. Betz, "Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part One)," *Modern Theology* 21/3 (2005): 367–411; and "Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part Two)," *Modern Theology* 22/1 (2006): 1–50. Other recent discussions of the sublime from a theological perspective include Ben Quash, 'The De-sublimations of Christian Art', in *The Art of the Sublime*, ed. Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding, January 2013, accessed 30 August 2014, http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/ben-quash-the-de-sublimations-of-christian-art-r1140522; Grace Jantzen, "On Changing the Imaginary," in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 289–90; Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, "Aesthetics: The Theological Sublime," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, et. al. (London: Routledge, 1999), 201–219; and Paul S. Fiddes, "The Sublime and the Beautiful: Intersections between Theology and Literature," in *Literature and Theology: New Interdisciplinary Spaces*, ed. Heather Walton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 127–152.

[10] Betz, "Beyond the Sublime (Part One)," 371.

Space does not permit a full discussion of these critiques, but what I want to focus on here is how Betz employs the doctrine of the analogy of being as a means to bridge this division between beauty and the sublime. He specifically builds on the understanding of the analogy of being developed by the twentieth-century theologian Erich Przywara (1889–1972). Przywara identifies two analogies: the immanent analogy and the theological analogy. The immanent analogy is the creature's basic state of being, which is suspended between "essence in existence" and "essence beyond existence." The theological analogy is the relation between human becoming and divine Being, where essence and existence are identical.[11]

The relevance of this for aesthetics is that it provides a model for how to relate beauty and the sublime in a fruitful way without collapsing them. On the one hand, in accord with the immanent analogy, "every experience of the beautiful is always pervaded by the sublime wonder over its sheer facticity, its sheer possibility…." On the other hand, this immanent experience by the creature intersects with the theological analogy, where "the sublime not only reveals the gratuity of created beauty, but also interrupts it in the name of an *ever greater* beauty…the beauty of one whose essence is to be and whose beauty is sublime."[12]

Sustaining Depth with Hiroshi Senju

Our surveys of Senju, *yūgen*, and the theological perspectives were brief, but by placing them together, what can we see?

First, Senju's paintings are particularly effective instantiations of the analogy of being. On the one hand, there is the relation of the paintings between the adjacent rooms. This exemplifies the immanent analogy, being in-and-beyond existence, since the viewer's experience of the single room is always in relation to and modified by an awareness of what is "beyond" in the next room. On the other hand, the relation of the paintings to what is outside of them exemplifies the theological analogy, being in-and-beyond creation, as the experience of the paintings is further modified by the intersection with a different world, as it were, the outside world of nature. Across both "analogies"—the relation of the internal rooms and the relation of the rooms to the outside—there always exists a gradual continuum where the experience of spatial depth may open to an experience of ontological depth. In this way, Senju's paintings give vivid expression to the analogy of being in a form that enables the viewer to grasp its rich insight in one look.

Second, if we look more specifically at the relation of the theological aesthetic perspectives to *yūgen*, we can note that the latter proves to be a useful ally. Ōnishi contrasted *yūgen* with the tragic sublime of the West, emphasizing a non-dualistic

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[11] Betz, "Beyond the Sublime (Part Two)," 22.
[12] Betz, "Beyond the Sublime (Part Two)," 34, italics original.

perspective that does not view the encounter between subject and object as one of confrontation. So, in some ways Ōnishi—writing in the first half of the twentieth century—was already aware of the problems with the sublime that the contemporary theological perspectives identify. Inasmuch as the theological perspectives aim to correct Kant and his postmodern progeny through recourse to pre-modern, Christian theological notions, it is possible to view the Western sublime that has developed over the last two hundred years, especially with its implicit idea of conflict, as an aberration. Therefore, Ōnishi's attempt at finding a universal category of the sublime may not be entirely misguided, but the tragic sublime would need to be replaced by a peaceful sublime—especially as expressed in the analogy of being—as a true counterpart for *yūgen*.

But while the respective perspectives from theological aesthetics and Japanese aesthetics show points of similarity, it is important not to elide their differences. These are seen in their distinct intellectual concepts that have been mentioned, such as *yūgen* for Japanese aesthetics and the analogy of being for theological aesthetics. These different concepts, in turn, rest of distinct presuppositions. *Yūgen* has roots in a non-theistic Buddhist perspective that does not posit a unique personality at the basis of the universe. Instead, it stresses the impermanence and interrelatedness of all things in their simultaneous co-arising. By contrast, the theological perspectives are based on the notion of a personal, Triune God that provides a ground for existence as relational, but also preserves the difference of God from creation, highlighting the need for analogy.

Yet, despite the presuppositional differences, the two separate approaches reach a similar conclusion: a peaceful depth that harmoniously crosses borders of difference, the very thing we saw was the hallmark of Senju's paintings. Returning to Shofuso one last time, we can see this in the interplay of black and white in the paintings. The challenge, as Senju notes, is to find the harmony in competing forces, such as black and white, and this reveals art's primary function. As he says, "In other words, art is the wisdom of creating peace. It is wisdom for how to get along."[13] Thus, across the paintings in Shofuso we can feel the beautiful surface of the screen of white give way to the sublime depths of black beneath, showing how it is not only possible, but necessary to maintain a relational continuum across the two.

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[13] Hiroshi Senju, わたしが芸術について語るなる, *Watashi ga geijutsu nitsuite katarunaru*, [If I speak about art] (Tokyo: Poplar-sha, 2011), 170. The translation is my own.

Figure 1: Yoshimura Junzo, Shofuso Japanese House, 1954. Philadelphia, West Fairmont Park. Photo by Peter Doebler, 06/04/14.

Figure 2: Hiroshi Senju, *Imagination of Dynamics*, 2007, acrylics on hemp paper. Philadelphia, Shofuso Japanese House. Photo by Peter Doebler, 06/04/14. Reproduced with permission from the Shofuso Japanese House.

Figure 3: Hiroshi Senju, *Imagination of Silence*, 2007, acrylics on hemp paper. Philadelphia, Shofuso Japanese House. Photo by Peter Doebler, 06/04/14. Reproduced with permission from the Shofuso Japanese House.

Figure 4: Hiroshi Senju, *Imagination of Dynamics* and *Imagination of Silence*, 2007, acrylics on hemp paper. Philadelphia, Shofuso Japanese House. Photo by Peter Doebler, 06/04/14. Reproduced with permission from the Shofuso Japanese House.

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Learning to Listen: Reflections on Interreligious Aesthetics
By William Dyrness

Thank you for these three stimulating papers, which further our project not only of trying to listen to strange music, but of learning to see how strange or tone-deaf we are! Both Michelle Voss Roberts and Peter Doebler focus on the way images connect with and work on the viewer, while Peter Schadler calls attention to the historical development of the forms of special preparation for such sacred productions. Since Peter Doebler's and Michelle Voss Robert's papers address such closely related issues, I want to spend some time thinking about their similarities and differences, and then see what Peter Schadler might add to the discussion.

These two papers together portray a particular "receptive imagination" that I want to focus on. Let me begin with a comment on the way Senju's images evoke, as Peter Doebler says, a sublime that sustains a peaceful harmonious depth. We have seen in Peter's wonderful images of sliding doors in the Shofuso Japanese House in Philadelphia the way the multiple visual planes accentuate a shifting feeling of depth—where an experience "of spatial depth opens up to an experience of ontological depth." Using the Japanese notion of *Yügen*, a mysterious, obscure depth that stills the mind, Peter describes the way it enables viewers to become "aware of the fundamental interdependence of all things." This resonates with Michelle's description of *rasa*, or "relish" as a theological category and not just a descriptive category, and especially the primacy of Abhinavagupta's ninth *rasa* "peace." It would be interesting to compare *Rasa* and *Yügen* as related concepts that express somewhat different cultural and religious nuances. But I want to focus on what they have in common. Both papers underline the affective dimension of interfaith engagement, suggesting encounters that engage us as whole persons. But they also evince a fundamental difference that strikes me as worth noticing.

Michelle Voss Roberts describes the way religious texts and performances inspire the determination to live according to their reality, noting the way Indian religious performances carry rhetorical force—religion there, and in many cultures, is a performed art; the religious and aesthetic emotions are deeply intertwined. As Rūpa Gosvāmin put it, relishing performed dramas of Krishna can prepare the spectator to relish ultimate reality. But Michelle claims they can do more than this: Experiences of meditative peace can serve as aesthetic bridges between traditions, bridging she thinks conversations about transcendence, immanence and union. Her central claim is that discussions of *Rasa* bridge the gap between experience and critical reflection, helping us theorize how, for cultured spectators, aesthetics can be a medium of interreligious engagement. Her paper provides rich support for this possibility.

But how are we to conceive of this bridgework between traditions? Let me address this by referencing one of the chasms the bridge is meant to cross: experience and critical reflection. Her paper suggests to me that *Rasas*, for the Hindu believer, carry the very same

analytic weight that "critical reflection" does for a western thinker. *Rasa* is not simply a dimension of experience, it is clearly a reflective category, even as Michelle says, a theological category, in the sense of proposing that such experiences count as tastes of the divine and anticipate the final experience of *moksha.* But it is reflective only from a certain perspective—in terms of, I would say, a specific "receptive imagination."

Consider how different the process she describes is from the argument developed by Peter Doebler, when he makes use of Przywara's "immanent analogy" essence in and beyond existence, and his "theological analogy." Peter notes the way John Betz pits this essence in and beyond existence—or "becoming," against "Being" (in the sense of the identity between essence and existence) "that constitutes the most basic analogy between God and creatures." Doebler's claim that this provides a fruitful model for finding a relation between beauty and the sublime, without collapsing them, has much to commend it.

But I want to focus again on the chasm Michelle wants us to cross, the radical difference between these two approaches to relating to reality, which Peter Doebler's paper especially highlights. Peter's excellent discussion of Western notions of sublime and Senju's "sublime," demonstrates how Senju's work "evokes" a mysterious obscure depth; while, Peter notes, Western notions of the sublime portray the sublime as tragic and depict nature as an enemy, which, Makoto Ueda points out, stimulates feelings of antagonism and resistance.

This way of comparing these notions focuses on how differently the sublime is experienced, but I would argue the difference goes much deeper than this. Contemporary theologians, Peter Doebler notes, have traced this to a western view of reality that is at root, violent. But I would propose this difference of terms reflects a radically different imagination behind these experiences. When one reads Kant's description of the sublime, one is struck by the way Kant is not describing an experience; he is constructing a concept—and in doing so he is shaping an imagination. He is after what he calls the "faculty of presentation; so that in the case of a given intuition of this faculty or the imagination is considered as in agreement with the *faculty of concepts* of Understanding or Reason" (*Critique of Judgment*, Par 23).[1] Though like beauty, the sublime also pleases, Kant says, unlike beauty the sublime is "boundless" even if its "totality is present to thought" so that the "mind is not merely attracted by the object" but at the same time it is repelled. The sublime is ultimately, Kant judges, unsuited to the imagination, doing violence to it. This concept of sublime is then further analyzed according to its Mathematical and Dynamic determination (*Critique of Judgment,* Book II, Par. 23- 26). The difference here, it seems to me, is not simply experiences of the sublime—they may in fact be phenomenologically similar as Michelle argues; what is different is the stance toward reality that these traditions reflect, and what in the end is made of these experiences—how they are "seen."

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[1] *Critique of Judgment,* Trans. J. H. Bernard (Mineola: New York: Dover Publications, 2005), 61-63.

Flannery O'Connor has famously said the "beam in our eye is the 20th century"—perhaps we would now say the 21st century, or better the whole Western intellectual heritage, or even, for people like me, the Protestant Christian heritage. Michelle Voss Robert's rich discussion of *Rasa* and Peter Doebler's description of the art of Senju evoke a rhetoric deeply at odds with the one we take for granted in western discourse. We come to our work, as Western scholars, gifted (or burdened) with an imagination formed by what we might call "interpretive categories." We want to know: How can we construct a framework that accounts for what we experience? On reflection, even our language betrays us: we *grasp* things, we *construe* or *comprehend* them. Such an activist (or, in Kant's term, synthetic) imagination is not entirely perverse, of course, but these papers underline for me what they exclude. Even if we make use of the language of desire and pleasure, as Kant so conspicuously does, we enclose these within the procrustean bed of our categories, whose predatory stance further influences how we are inclined to experience aesthetic objects. By contrast, Michelle Voss Robert's discussion of *Rasa* (and also the peaceful sublime of Senju) offer, not interpretive categories, but a posture of reception—consider the way words like evoke, listen, open up, imply an eagerness to receive. I want to place this "posture of reception" over against our "interpretive imagination"—the one opens, the other seeks to close.

Peter Doebler hopefully suggests this imagination, being only 200 years old, may be corrected by a return to pre-modern resources; Michelle Voss Roberts similarly calls attention to the *Song of Songs* in the Jewish and Christian traditions, and Peter Schadler offers examples of pre-modern interfaith exchange. Such retrieval may include recovering Augustine's notion of the way desire moves the soul. As Robert O'Connell describes this, Augustine shows that what draws us upward and away from physical desire is a spiritual "appetite" for "beatitude: beatitude which is only the more attractive for embodying, on a higher, spiritual level, all the allure of erotic desire."[2] The interfaith exchange fostered by these two papers provides further impetus for this recovery.

Meanwhile, given the beam in our eye, how do we prepare ourselves to experience a mysterious depth without having to figure it out? To listen, to feel, without needing to comprehend? Here Peter Schadler's discussion of forms of preparation for artistic production is helpful. I am struck by the way preparation for writing icons, which did not develop, he tells us, until the 16th century in Russia, soon came to cultivate forms of prayer, asking for the Lord's help, an openness that seeks guidance and asks for illumination. This suggests the posture of reception need not be promiscuous. Prayer in the Jewish and Christian traditions is after all an arena of discernment, even, as with Jacob, of wrestling with God. Perhaps in the western tradition prayer is our best (maybe our only) example of reflective reception.

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[2] This is Robert O'Connell description of Augustine's use of sexual desire, "Sexuality in Saint Augustine," *Augustine Today,* ed. R. J. Neuhaus (Eerdmans, 1993), 76.

Of course things are more complicated than I am making them out to be. As Michelle Voss Roberts points out, though the experiences of mystical union may be similar, differences "can spark various intensifications, denials or shifts in theology." She goes on to note the way negative emotions—compassion, disgust, fury, and terror—can actually provide a kind of analytic function, telling us when something is wrong. Such anger can rally oppressed groups to action, as indeed it has done in India's history.

So proposing as I am doing, following Michelle Voss Roberts, categories of reception (or better postures of reception) do not forbid discernment, though they demote it. But perhaps they also suggest that reception has its limits. In light of the evident violence that accompanies the human project, the yogic and tantric systems of meditation that still the mind to become aware of the mysterious obscure depth and the interdependence of all things, that seek the harmony in competing voices, provide precious resources. But all religious traditions have pressed the question at this point: Is harmony, or reconciliation, a gift, something simply to be received, something to which we simply open ourselves? Or is it a project, something that we must prepare ourselves to explore, and then apply ourselves to discover and work to achieve? These fine papers suggest ways in which it may be both.

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Opening Remarks for "Interreligious Responses to Climate Change"
By Anthony J. Watson

Good afternoon and thank you for attending the first joint panel between the Comparative Theology Group and Interreligious and Interfaith Studies Group at the American Academy of Religion. While our subject this evening, Interreligious Responses to Climate Change, is prompted by the focus of this year's Annual Meeting on climate change and the environment, it is also a highly appropriate subject for this panel.

In the past thirty years we have witnessed an increasing level of interconnectedness that makes both this panel and its topic quite relevant. Despite popular descriptions of this interconnectedness as making a "flat" world, I would argue that the conception of the world being flat implies a mode of thinking that is beholden to the twentieth century, where one moved between points on map. In this conception of the world, nations sought to be united, world wars were fought, and businesses strove to become "world-wide" in their operations. By contrast, in the society of the twenty-first century, we increasingly perceive our existence to be less that of moving across a flat surface than to be comprised of an increasing web of complex interconnections. We perceive our existence as global. This change in perception from the worldwide to the global is accompanied by a shift in what it means to belong to such a society. At a time of instantaneous communication, at a time when anyone in this room can board a plane after this talk and disembark tomorrow on the other side of the planet, the degree to which we are interconnected has increased exponentially. Scholars such as Diana Eck have highlighted the new interreligious fabric of American society, where the world, so to speak, is next door. In such a society, we have different obligations to one another, to those we have yet to meet, and to the planet we all call home. We have moved from a society where a select few were considered citizens of the world while the rest stayed in place, to a framework where we are all interconnected global citizens. As such, we all bear responsibility to one another. A key aspect of this responsibility is the implied stewardship we therefore have for the health of our planet. The application of this stewardship to an interreligious context is a task to which many practitioners and scholars of religion have turned their collective efforts.

Thus this panel and its topic. A central question asked by those practicing comparative theology and interreligious dialogue centers on the issue of how members from within one particular tradition and those from outside that tradition learn from one another. To state the topic for this panel, a guiding principle of comparative theology is exploring and enriching one's own theology and practice through the close study of another theological tradition. Indeed, this was a guiding principle set forth in the Group Statement for the American Academy of Religion's Comparative Theology Group in 2006. The process is inherently dialogical, and this invariably leads to a degree of solidarity between traditions. Interreligious engagement similarly seeks to create solidarity through joint action, such as actions for peace and social justice, grassroots encounters, and

relationship-building. Both modes of engagement can be seen at play in interreligious responses to the global crisis of climate change.

This panel explores how these two modes of response are informed or deepened by the other in the specific context of climate change. In addition, it raises a broader question: How can we create a space at the intersection of comparative theology and interreligious engagement that allows for pragmatic and constructive responses to global crises? In addressing these questions tonight we are joined by an excellent panel. The Reverend Ian Mevorach holds a B.A. in Philosophy from Middlebury College, an M.Div. from Boston University School of Theology (BUSTH), and is currently in the final stages of a PhD in Theological Ethics at Boston University. His dissertation, in the field of ecological theology and ethics, explores the role of religion and spirituality in the ecological crisis. In a spiritual sense, the ecological crisis is a result of our loss of awareness of the sacredness of creation; to reverse the crisis, we need to restore our spiritual vision of nature. The Reverend Mevorach represents the American Baptist Churches USA on the board of Creation Justice Ministries, a national, multi-denominational ecological justice coalition. He recently published a book chapter titled, "Stewards of Creation: A Christian Calling for Today's Ecological Crisis," which appeared in *For Such a Time as This: Young Adults on the Future of the Church* (Judson Press, 2014). He is currently teaching a course at Emmanuel College in Boston called, "Religion and the Environment: Ethical Explorations." He is active in the movement for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation that includes people of conscience from all cultures, beliefs, and generations.

Loye Ashton is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. He is the Director of the Center for International Studies and Global Change at Tougaloo and Director of the Tougaloo College Honors Program. He served as Department Chair of the Liberal Studies Department (interdisciplinary humanities) from his hiring at Tougaloo in 2006 until his appointment to become the Director of the CISGC in 2013. He received a Masters of Theological Studies degree from the Boston University School of Theology and earned a PhD in Religious Studies (Comparative and Systematic Theology) from Boston University. In addition to numerous papers delivered at academic conferences, he has had three theological commentaries (for Propers 16-18) published in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Lectionary Commentary Series, Year B, Volumes 3 & 4* (2009, Westminster John Knox Press). He is also drafting a chapter submission for a forthcoming book on religion and immigration to be published by Fortress Press. He is completing work on a collaborative book-length project about the sources of the opposition to the Gülen/Hizmet interfaith peace movement (GHM) in Turkey and throughout the Turkish-speaking world. Interviews of his work with the Gülen movement are available on YouTube and many of his interfaith conference presentations have been published in Turkish.

Daniel P. Scheid completed his PhD at Boston College in Theological Ethics and is currently Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh,

PA. His research interests are in ecological and comparative theological ethics, and he is currently completing a book entitled, *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics.* Previous publications include: "Thomas Aquinas, the Cosmic Common Good, and Climate Change" in *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives,* and "Vedānta Deśika and Thomas Aquinas on the Intrinsic Value of Nature" in the *Journal of Vaishnava Studies.*

Michael VanZandt Collins is a doctoral student in Comparative Theology, minoring in Theological Ethics. He had served as a teacher of religion at Boston's Cristo Rey School and later worked as a community organizer in urban communities around issues of environmental justice. In 2011, returning to academia, Michael began a master's program in Islamic Studies at Harvard in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, where he focused his research in medieval Islamic thought and practice. In 2012, he studied classical Arabic at the Qasid Arabic Institute in Amman, Jordan, while working in interreligious dialogue at the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (Al-Markaz al-Urdunī libahūth al-Taʿaysh al-Dīnī). His research interests in medieval Sufi philosophy and spiritual practices and Qur'anic hermeneutics are placed in conversation with Jesuit spirituality and medieval Catholic theology. The long-term scope of his project is to develop a creative hermeneutic and constructive moral theology through which to engage issues at the intersection of religion and ecology.

Finally, responding to our panel will be Professor Wilhelmus "Pim" Valkenberg, who is Ordinary Professor of Religion and Culture at Catholic University of America. In his distinguished career, Professor Valkenberg has published, among others, *Words of the Living God* (Leuven, 2005), *The Three Rings* (Leuven, 2005), *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership* (Amsterdam/New York: Editions Rodopi, 2006), and recently edited *World Religions in Dialogue: A Comparative Theological Approach* (Anselm Academic, 2013).

Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the Ecological Crisis: Negotiating Ideological Obstacles to Common Ground
By Ian Mevorach

Abstract

This paper explores the prospects for Christian-Muslim dialogue and cooperation regarding the ecological crisis, including the climate crisis, through a dialogical comparison of the work of two thoughtful leaders from these religious communities, Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. McFague and Nasr, both born in 1933, have spent decades writing and speaking about the ecological crisis. Though they had opportunities to dialogue, they were unsuccessful in finding common ground. McFague's postmodern eco-feminist perspective and Nasr's traditionalist Muslim perspective are not easily reconcilable. This paper does not seek to conceal the apparent difficulties in negotiating the ideological obstacles between these two thinkers and the religious communities they represent, but seeks to show that such a negotiation is possible and worthwhile; substantial common ground can be established if we are willing to work through our differences.

Introduction

Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr both gave speeches during the Spirit and Nature symposium at Middlebury College in 1990; the symposium was organized by Steven Rockefeller in an effort to gather leaders from the world's major religions to explore the prospects for interreligious cooperation on defining a global environmental ethic. During a dialogue between the presenters, Nasr raised concerns about McFague's theology in response to the question of whether the major world religions would be willing to cooperate on environmental problems in the near future. In her speech earlier in the symposium, McFague had argued for the deconstruction of the monarchical model of God as king, a model that images a God who, in McFague's words, is "distant from the world, relates only to the human world, and controls that world through domination and benevolence."[1] Apparently this proposal was not sitting well with Nasr, who said:

> We have been presented with a very eloquent discourse by Professor McFague concerning the deconstruction of certain images of the Christian tradition. For me, as one who happens to be a Muslim, who knows a little about Christianity, and has lived a long time with Christians—even for me, it is very difficult to understand how if Christ said, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,' that now the image of Father will somehow have to be changed…This means that within

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[1] Steven Rockefeller and John Elder, eds., *Spirit and Nature: Why The Environment is a Religious Issue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 49.

> Christianity there is, if not a crisis, then certainly a tension of views which is not at all the same as in other religions.[2]

McFague's mode of interpreting the Christian tradition would make it difficult for Nasr, as a Muslim, to dialogue with her. It should be noted that Nasr is part of a school of thought within the Sufi tradition that recognizes the *sophia perennis* or perennial philosophy in all major religious traditions, philosophies, and indigenous spiritualities. Nasr is willing to dialogue with a wide range of religions, but McFague's postmodern interpretation of Christianity appears to be out of his range of acceptability.

Several years after the symposium in a book titled, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, Nasr continues his criticism of McFague's deconstruction of the monarchical model:

> In Islam the Names al-Rabb (the Lord) and al-Malik (the King) are Names of God, sacred not only in their meaning but also in their form, and it is beyond the power of man to change them even for what might appear to be a worthy purpose. The equating of symbol in its traditional sense as contained in revealed descriptions of God of Himself with metaphor to be changed at will by humans is, to say the least, most problematic from the traditional theological point of view.[3]

If Nasr, as a traditionalist Muslim, were to accept McFague's point of view as being valid, it could open the door to the "crisis" or "tension of views" that Nasr perceives within Christianity.

McFague did not reply to Nasr's criticism. Apparently, from her perspective, his objections to her theology indicated that dialogue would be a non-starter.

However, it is important to note that Nasr's own ecological theology does not emphasize the divine names Lord or King, which he so passionately defends. Instead, Nasr highlights the name al-Muhit, a Quranic name for God that is typically translated as the all-encompassing, but which Nasr translates "the Environment." A more constructive rather than combative mode of dialogue between McFague and Nasr would be to look for common ground between Nasr's concept of God as the Divine Environment that encompasses the natural environment and McFague's constructive model of the world as God's body. In fact, these are similar concepts that are both designed to restore or revive awareness of the sacredness of nature by naming the intimate connection between God and nature. Nasr and McFague both advance doctrines of God that are meant to resacralize nature because both authors identify the desacralization of nature as the spiritual root cause of the ecological crisis. Both believe that the world has been misconceived via Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanism as a lifeless machine, when in fact the world is a living body animated by the Spirit of God.

Untried Strategies for Attaining Common Ground

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[2] Steven C. Rockefeller, "Keeping Faith with Life" in *Spirit and Nature: Why The Environment is a Religious Issue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 180-181.

[3] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 146.

Interestingly, during the same dialogue at the Spirit and Nature symposium that first revealed their apparently irreconcilable differences, both Nasr and McFague presented principles by which they could conceive of interreligious dialogue and cooperation happening successfully.

McFague suggested that religious leaders could maintain diverse cultural values and worldviews and still find common ground by taking it upon themselves "to make this common danger speak—[and] be seen for what it is in its immensity." "Those of us gathered here," McFague argued, "although we see things in different ways, can at least agree that we are faced with an enormous danger, and that part of what we mean by salvation is the well-being of our planet and its creatures."[4] McFague proposes that the problem itself be taken as the locus of common ground rather than some unattainable synthesis of world religions into a global ecological faith.

Nasr, likewise, argued that, "[D]espite all the troubles there is definitely the possibility of both discourse and accord among religions as far as the environment is concerned."[5] Nasr asserts that those in every tradition who are attracted to ecological questions are also attracted to the inward or esoteric dimensions of their traditions. Because, in Nasr's conception of interfaith dialogue, "only the hearts of religions really meet," it is likely that those religious leaders who focus on nature as well as the "inward… mystical… contemplative dimension" of their traditions will also be able to engage in "a profound dialogue religiously."[6]

Pursuing McFague's strategy, one finds remarkable common ground by viewing McFague and Nasr's ecological theologies in reference to their understandings of the problem itself, rather than in reference to their cultural and religious identities. Pursuing Nasr's strategy, one finds a wealth of common ground when one considers McFague's works after her fourth conversion, which she describes as a mystical awakening to the reality of God as love.[7]

More Differences

But before we further explore their common ground, more should be said about their differences. The differences between McFague and Nasr develop along the fault lines of their cultural and religious identities; there are many places where the values and worldview of an eco-feminist Protestant North American and a Sufi traditionalist Iranian Muslim collide. Nasr and McFague could have encountered these same basic disagreements were they to dialogue about any subject, and yet no other subject besides the ecological crisis had the gravity to bring them to the same table despite their differences. Their

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[4] Rockefeller, "Keeping Faith with Life," 187.

[5] Ibid., 180.

[6] Ibid.

[7] McFague's fourth conversion took place after Nasr's critiques of her work, and it is quite possible that he might not have observed McFague's turn towards the mystical dimensions of Christianity beginning with the publication of *Life Abundant* in 2000.

differences are profound and should not be minimized. For example, as already noted, Nasr treats the symbols of his tradition as divinely revealed while McFague treats hers as humanly constructed. They therefore clash over whether an ecological theology should be primarily a recovery of neglected elements from one's tradition, or rather a process of deconstructing and reconstructing one's tradition. Another example: Nasr sees traditional Islamic cosmology and metaphysics as retaining their authority and validity; McFague lives in a world defined cosmologically by contemporary science. Therefore, they differ about how to position their ecological theologies vis a vis contemporary science, especially the common creation story of the big bang and evolution. Nasr cannot accept this common creation story because it undermines the metaphysical truth claims of his traditional religion; McFague embraces it as a necessary element of an intellectually credible contemporary ecological theology. They also clash over the idea of "hierarchy"—which Nasr embraces and McFague rejects.[8]

Nasr argues that the solution to the ecological crisis will only be found through a recovery of traditional cosmology and metaphysics. McFague argues that the solution to the ecological crisis will only be found through a new construction of religious symbolism that breaks radically with modern and medieval Christianity. These are very different strategies for solving the ecological crisis; one is traditional, one is postmodern. But they are two ways of addressing the same problem. Both McFague and Nasr agree that there is a spiritual crisis at the root of the ecological crisis. They both tell a story of a "fall" in Western history describing how a desacralized view of the world as a machine developed in the Renaissance and Enlightenment in Western Europe and became firmly established by modern science or scientism. They both agree that the West was susceptible to such a fall because of mainstream Western Christianity's stark divide between the natural and the supernatural and its tendency to see God as exclusively above and beyond nature. Nasr believes that traditional Islam does not have the same problem of devaluing nature, and so it could be a resource for Christianity's recovery of a spiritual vision of nature.

Example of Common Ground: Doctrines of God

As mentioned earlier, McFague's concept of the world as God's body and Nasr's concept of God as *al-Muhit* symbolize the intimate interrelation of God and the world. When she first introduced it in 1993 in *The Body of God*, McFague's concept of the world as God's body spoke more to God's immanence and less to God's transcendence than Nasr's concept of God as "the Divine Environment, the Spirit" surrounding and permeating the natural environment.[9] However, in *Religion and the Order of Nature* Nasr more or less affirms that the world is God's body. Nasr writes, "[O]ne can say that the order of nature is nothing but the Divine Reality manifesting itself on the plane of phenomenal existence."[10]

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[8] Robert Bellah's typology from his 1964 essay, "Religious Evolution," is helpful for understanding where the differences between McFague and Nasr come from, insofar as McFague fits roughly within Bellah's category of "modern religion" and Nasr fits even more roughly in the category of "historical religion."

[9] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and the Environmental Crisis" in *Spirit and Nature: Why The Environment is a Religious Issue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 90.

[10] Nasr, *Religion,* 62.

And again, "The order of nature is not only created by God through His Will, but derives from the Divine Substance."[11] McFague, in her 2008 work, *A New Climate for Theology*, introduces two metaphorical buffers to her model of the world as God's body meant to protect her panentheism from appearing pantheistic: "first, as we are to our bodies, so God is to the world (the body infused, enlivened by mind/soul/spirit); and second, the world is in God as a baby is in the womb."[12] Taken in their full forms, McFague and Nasr's ecological doctrines of God can be synthesized into a concept of God as the Divine Environment, the Spirit encompassing and permeating the natural environment, which is the body of God.

Furthermore, McFague and Nasr both point to the contemplative or mystic as the fulfillment and model of ecological consciousness needed to correct the ecological crisis. McFague speaks, mystically, of the "universal self," which goes beyond the ordinary boundaries of the individual ego-self and embraces the whole world in compassion as part of its body. Nasr presents a similar concept, the "universal man," who experiences spiritual unity through his human body with all other bodies and nature as a whole. From these "universal" perspectives, McFague affirms that "the world is my body" and Nasr affirms, similarly, "that in the deepest sense the body of the cosmos is *our* body."[13] Furthermore, Nasr and McFague both identify Hildegard of Bingen and Francis of Assisi as the two primary guides for Christianity in its recovery of its lost spiritual vision of nature. Another set of concepts that is strikingly similar to each other is McFague's "loving eye" and Nasr's "eye of the heart," which the authors propose to correct a way of seeing that objectifies nature. There is much more profound common ground between Nasr and McFague that my research has uncovered, which I do not have time to describe in this essay.

Conclusion

In closing, I would call our attention to a recent development in the climate justice movement: the push for churches, government bodies, academic institutions, and foundations to divest from fossil fuel companies. The key ethical principle of the divestment movement is the priority of planetary responsibility over fiduciary responsibility. The argument for divestment is that the urgency of the climate crisis calls us to forgo profiting from the production and consumption of fossil fuels and to accept potentially lower returns by reinvesting in companies doing less harm to the planet. I would suggest that a similar ethical principle guide our attempts at interfaith dialogue regarding climate change and the ecological crisis in general: that is, a prioritization of planetary responsibility over ideological responsibility.

Theologians and other religious leaders who are responsible for steering interfaith dialogue on climate change are also responsible for maintaining and advancing the unique cultural and religious values of their communities; that is part of the nature of being an intellectual within a religious community. However, as the ecological crisis, and especially climate change, becomes more and more urgent we should subordinate our disparate

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[11] Ibid., 63.

[12] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 115.

[13] Nasr, *Religion*, 260.

ideological agendas to the common planetary agenda. This principle recognizes the ecological crisis as a cosmic problem and will empower us to continue to dialogue and find common ground despite our many irreconcilable differences. We cannot afford to hold interfaith dialogue and cooperation on the ecological crisis hostage because of our ideological disagreements. The question is one of priorities. If we are willing to dialogue and find the common ground needed to bring Christian, Muslim, and other religious communities together to address the ecological crisis, we can do this. This essay shows that even in difficult cases the puzzle pieces of our unique cultural and religious identities will fit together well enough to function if we are willing to let them.

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Catholic Common Good, Buddhist Interdependence, and the Practice of Interreligious Ecological Ethics
By Daniel P. Scheid

ABSTRACT:
Concerns of ecological degradation due to climate change encourage an interreligious dialogue that mutually reinforces the primary aim of each (sustainability) while also offering an opportunity for further expansion and critique. I employ a comparative theological method in order to place ecologically reconstructed understandings of the common good in Catholic social thought, as expressed by John Hart and Jame Schaefer, with ecologically reconstructed understandings of interdependence in Mahayana Buddhism, as articulated by Joanna Macy and Thich Nhat Hanh. In content and methodology, Buddhists and Catholics share significant common ground, yet engaging their differences generates new content for each. Buddhist interdependence affirms and stretches dimensions of a Catholic cosmic common good by making stronger calls to identify with non-human creatures. Each theologian's vision is shaped by their personal work on justice and sustainability issues, demonstrating that interreligious ecological ethics must therefore be engaged in concrete issues and not merely be textual or academic.

In response to climate change, the preeminent ecological challenge, eco-theology has at least a twofold function: first, to make religious traditions intellectually plausible in light of the new and shifting understandings of the Earth's fragility and of humanity's role and responsibility; second, to spark and to sustain commitment among religious adherents to personal and social transformation. These two aims of course are not entirely separable, but they are distinct: doctrinal responses and activist agendas. Climate change thus requires more than an academic approach that offers creative articulations of traditional principles.[1] It requires practical engagement, which itself yields new insights that a purely conceptual or textual approach might miss.

Interreligious dialogue offers a significant way to accomplish these two aims: first, to reinforce mutually the primary aim of each – sustainability – and to make the traditions more compelling in motivating a commitment to that aim; second, to expose differences between traditions, which would offer an opportunity for further critique of each tradition's concepts and stimulate further creative articulations.

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[1] These academic approaches often focus on theoretical cosmological models of humanity's relationship to non-humans. Willis Jenkins warns against the "cosmological temptation" for doing ecological ethics. When people respond to actual situations, their ethical choices tend to be more pluralist, drawing on a variety of contextually appropriate responses, rather than a "top-down" approach in which the expert outlines the "correct" moral vision and expects the right ethical choices to follow. Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*: *Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 79.

Here I employ a comparative theological method to place into dialogue ecologically reconstructed principles from different traditions: a Catholic cosmic common good, focusing on the work of John Hart and Jame Schaefer in the Catholic tradition, and Buddhist interdependence, from Joanna Macy and Thich Nhat Hanh in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. I compare not only the principles themselves but also the trans-religious means by which they are expressed. There are two benefits from this comparison: conceptually, the Buddhist vision of interdependence both affirms and stretches dimensions of a Catholic cosmic common good. Second, the similarity in methodological approach in all four theologians suggests the importance of personal engagement in concrete ecological issues as key to articulating intellectually plausible concepts.

I. Catholic Tradition

The principle of the common good has been an important component of Catholic ecological ethics from the beginning, given its prominence in the tradition and the obvious parallels to environmentalism. The classic definition stems from John XXIII, who explains that the common good is "the sum total of conditions of social living, whereby persons are enabled more fully and readily to achieve their own perfection."[2] The common good is a form of holism that emphasizes the integral relationship between the part and the whole and privileges the goodness and identity of the whole as a whole. There is a dynamic relationship between the person and the community, such that the good of the person cannot be separated from the health of the culture that allows that person's good to emerge.[3] Thus the common good corresponds well to the ecological sciences and their focus not only on individual creatures but also on whole ecosystems.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops, for example, in their 2001 document *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, recognize the way in which fluctuations in the global climate have far reaching repercussions: "Global climate is by its very nature a part of the planetary commons. The earth's atmosphere encompasses all people, creatures, and habitats. The melting of ice sheets and glaciers, the destruction of rain forests, and the pollution of water in one place can have environmental impacts elsewhere."[4] They thus call attention to "the universal common good," and they argue that all nations must acknowledge our interdependence and the fact that our choices have consequences in other parts of the world.

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[2] John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 65. Similarly, the major Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* defines the common good as the "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment." *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 26.
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

[3] See David Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[4] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good* (2001). http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-for-dialogue-prudence-and-the-common-good.cfm

Similarly, in their 1991 pastoral letter *Renewing the Earth*, the U.S. Bishops discuss the importance of a "planetary common good." They note that Pope John XXIII, in *Pacem in Terris*, witnessed the increasing interdependence of the world and in response "extended the traditional principle of the common good from the nation-state to the world community." Analogously, the bishops observe that environmental problems indicate a new dimension of our global interdependence: "Ecological concern has now heightened our awareness of just how interdependent our world is. Some of the gravest environmental problems are clearly global. In this shrinking world, everyone is affected and everyone is responsible, although those most responsible are often the least affected." As a result they suggest that "the universal common good can serve as a foundation for a global environmental ethic."[5]

While the U.S. Bishops and other Church leaders do speak of a planetary common good, in general Catholic social teaching remains primarily anthropocentric, seeing climate change as a threat to human well-being, rather than to non-human and planetary flourishing. By contrast, there is a growing consensus among Catholic theologians that Catholics must promote an expanded vision of the common good – what I call the "cosmic common good" – and the reciprocal well-being of humans and nonhumans.[6]

For example, John Hart argues that "'common good' understandings should be extended to nonhuman creation."[7] The "commons," such as a school or village commons, connotes not only physical proximity but also a shared life, a common task that binds the local people together. The commons is a context for mutual flourishing, a place where people are nourished physically, socially, and interpersonally.[8] Hart expands this vision of the commons to the bioregional commons, where diverse species live interrelated and interdependent lives; to the Earth commons, the "shared spaced that is the source of life-providing common goods for all creatures"[9]; and even all creation as a commons, "because it is the home of humans and all other creatures, and the locus of their interactive and interdependent and integrated relationships."[10] The common good includes the instrumental goods creatures need, the well-being of each creature, the social nature of the creature, and the good of the whole to which they belong. The cosmic common good represents the health and well-being of creatures and the integral context for their shared life together, whether ecosystems, Earth, or the cosmos as a whole.

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[5] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Earth* (1991). http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/renewing-the-earth.cfm.

[6] See Daniel P. Scheid, *The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[7] John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 68.

[8] Ibid., 16.

[9] Ibid., 62.

[10] Ibid., 33.

Jame Schaefer has also developed a vision of the cosmic common good, drawing on multiple classical theologians and their nuanced theologies of creation. Appealing to figures such as Augustine, John Chrysostom, and especially Thomas Aquinas, yet also updating them with relevant insights from the contemporary sciences, Schaefer contends that creation's goodness is a solid foundation for affirming the instrumental and intrinsic goodness of creatures, the goodness of their relationships with each other, and the overall common good. First, Schaefer's patristic and medieval interlocutors stressed the intrinsic goodness of creatures. Any creature that exists, whether it is perceived as beneficial or detrimental to human well-being, is good because it is created by God. Second, these theologians also recognized a spectrum of worth and value. God did not create all creatures to be absolutely equal. Rather, God endowed creatures with varying capacities, and thus appointed certain creatures to be above and superior to other creatures. Human beings, who alone among Earthly creatures possess the capacities of reason and free will, are ordained to use nonhuman creatures. This use can be physical, to sustain human life, or cognitive, as humans use nonhumans to grow in their understanding of God. Third, the classical Catholic tradition has nevertheless insisted on the greater goodness of the entirety of the universe and the ways in which creatures are ordered to each other. Despite humanity's elevated status among Earth's creatures, the greatest aspect of the universe is the totality of creatures and their relationships.[11] Finally, the cosmic common good is ultimately theocentric: all creatures, individually and as a whole, belong to and are ordained to return to God, who is the "absolute common good of all creatures."[12] While God is the absolute cosmic common good, Schaefer defines the internal common good of creation as the "internal sustainability and integrity of the universe,"[13] while she understands the planetary common good as "a life-sustaining and flourishing planet."[14]

While Hart, Schaefer, and others argue eloquently for a Catholic cosmic common good, dialogue with Buddhist eco-theologians has the potential both to confirm some of the basic insights of the cosmic common good, as well as stimulate new innovations. Climate change is so pressing and the effects so dire, all traditions must work fervently to establish as broad and as shared a foundation among themselves as possible in order that all religious traditions might impact global deliberations.

II. Buddhist Traditions

Similar to their Christian counterparts, Buddhists have ecologically reoriented their concepts in multifarious ways.[15] Here I focus on one principle that I believe parallels the

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[11] Jame Schaefer, "Environmental Degradation, Social Sin, and the Common Good," in Richard Miller, ed., *God, Creation, and Climate Change*, ed. Richard Miller (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010): 69-94, 81.

[12] Ibid., 81.

[13] Ibid., 81.

[14] Ibid., 87.

[15] The chapters in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Williams, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) offer many such diverse approaches.

cosmic common good: *pratītyasamutpāda* (Sanskrit; paṭiccasamuppāda in Pali), translated as co-dependent origination, conditioned arising, or interdependence.[16]

The principle of co-dependent origination expresses a core component of the Buddha's awakening, an insight into the nature of the world that also helps to end the causes of suffering. Co-dependent origination emphasizes the fleeting character of this world, that all things that exist are in a constant process of change. Their origin or core depends on external factors or conditions for their emergence, for them to exist as they are.

Two other Buddhist principles amplify the insight of co-dependent origination. Impermanence (*anicca*) underscores the fact that all things are in the process of changing. Impermanence teaches that "nothing exists absolutely, with an absolute nature; 'things' only arise in a mutually conditioning network of processes."[17] No-self (*anattā*) applies impermanence to our very identity: there is no stable, permanent self beneath the shifting patterns of feelings, desires, and thoughts we discern in our mind. Not only is the world, to which we develop inordinate and destructive attachments, in a process of ceaseless change, but so too is our very self.

Originally, the Buddha's teaching of *pratītyasamutpāda* was focused on uncovering and eliminating the kinds of thirsts or craving that lead to dissatisfaction (*dukkha*). Thich Nhat Hanh and Joanna Macy are two prominent modern Buddhist teachers who understand *pratītyasamutpāda* ecologically and see it as a positive force for peace and wholeness. Nhat Hanh and Macy are leading representatives of the movement known as "engaged Buddhism," which according to Sallie King is a "contemporary form of Buddhism that engages actively yet nonviolently with the social, economic, political, and ecological problems of society."[18] For Nhat Hanh and Macy, socially engaged Buddhism is not a modern addendum or distortion of Buddhist practice but an authentic expression that flows directly from core Buddhist principles.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist monk whose teaching focuses on mindfulness, being present, and interdependence, or better, interbeing. Initially trained as a Zen monk in his home country of Vietnam, Nhat Hanh later founded a new Buddhist order of monks and laity called the Order of Interbeing. For Nhat Hanh, interbeing is the best way to express the nature of reality and to deny any fundamental separation between self and other. Beings are not only co-dependent on each other, but they inter-are.

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[16] As Seth Clippard observes, "Because 'dependent origination' does not have the same ecological ring as 'interdependence,' it is clear that the latter, with its obvious sense that things are related, would be a more effective, meaningful translation with reference to environmentalism." Seth Clippard, "The Lorax Wears Saffron: Toward a Buddhist Environmentalism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 18 (2011): 212-248, 218.

[17] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 124.

[18] Sallie King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 1.

Nhat Hanh's most famous example of interbeing is his meditation on a piece of white paper. He encourages people to ponder the paper, to see all its relationships. If we do so, Nhat Hanh explains, we will see a cloud. Nhat Hanh does not mean this in solely a poetic or metaphorical sense. Rather, to see the paper clearly is to see all the conditions that led to its arising here and now, and this means the paper manifests all these other beings: "You will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either."[19] Nhat Hanh continues and discerns other factors, like sunshine, oxygen, and the humans who transformed the tree into paper. Since the cloud remains present in the paper, this means that whatever happens next to the paper, it can never truly cease to be. "This sheet of paper has never been born, and it will never die. It can take on other forms of being, but we are not capable of transforming a sheet of paper into nothingness."[20] By extension, Nhat Hanh's insight into interbeing applies to all things, even our very selves. We inter-are with an infinite number of other factors and beings, and so just as a separate and permanent "I" was never born, neither can a separate "I" ever die.

Nhat Hanh's meditation on a piece of paper has two goals: first, like the Buddha's insight into co-dependent origination, his description of interbeing is meant to enable meditators to see the reality of impermanence and no-self, and thus reduce their clinging and dissatisfaction. "If you look at anything carefully, deeply enough, you discover the mystery of interbeing, and once you have seen it you will no longer be subject to fear – fear of birth, or fear of death."[21] Second, Nhat Hanh's positive understanding of interbeing bears an important ecological message: healthy clouds and trees lead to healthy humans, while polluted clouds and degraded trees lead to more suffering for all.

Joanna Macy is a renowned lay Buddhist scholar-activist whose understanding of co-dependent origination also contains an important ecological dimension, and her work has been central for contemporary engaged Buddhists. Macy sees the principle of interdependence as the central doctrine of the Buddhist tradition, and she calls it the "deep ecology of all things."[22] Interdependence enables Buddhists to perceive the web that connects all beings, and this sense of interconnection helped Macy to understand the cause of her despair at the threat of nuclear war and ecological breakdown. Rather than a psychological weakness, such despair is a healthy reaction that accurately reflects the reality of interdependence.

Rather than merely unraveling a sense of self, a true insight into the principle of interdependence leads to an expanded sense of self. The self, Macy explains, is a "metaphoric construct of identity and agency," an idea that we use to gain self-approval and

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[19] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Essential Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 55.
[20] Ibid., 63.
[21] Ibid., 66.
[22] Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley CA: Parallax Press, 1991), 38.

provide a sense of security.[23] Like Nhat Hanh's interbeing, interdependence can enable us to see ourselves as containing a multitude of other beings. At the same time, Macy senses that Western culture is also shifting towards an expanded sense of self. Concerns about nuclear war and ecological degradation have begun to undermine the Western self who is an autonomous and easily separable individual. The Buddhist principle of interdependence can bolster the "greening of the self," in which humans understand themselves as integrally related to the life of other creatures and the planet itself. [24] Beings remain differentiated, like parts of the body;[25] this non-identical interdependence can motivate humans to care for nonhumans as their very selves.

III. Conceptual Insights

Placing Hart and Schaefer's vision of a Catholic cosmic common good into dialogue with Nhat Hanh and Macy's Buddhist interdependence yields a number of important insights, both for content and methodology.

First, to their similarities: both the cosmic common good and interdependence speak in terms of parts and wholes, such that human beings are constitutive parts along with all other beings of a larger cosmic whole. They both highlight the importance of relationships between beings rather than the beings themselves, but at the same time without denying or destroying differentiation. In this way, interreligious dialogue demonstrates a shared conceptual ground between these two traditions, which lends further credence to my claim of a broad common ecological vision across traditions.

Second, the theological dissonance between these two traditions bears the potential to generate new understandings of Catholic social thought. Interdependence and no-self propose a moral vision that in some ways escalates and concentrates the cosmic common good's depiction of how humans fit into a cosmic whole. Not only are humans part of nature – and what occurs in nature impacts humans – but we inter-are. Following Macy, Catholics may see the cosmic common good not as the good of multiple separate beings, but as a call to experience and to cultivate an expanded sense of self. Humans are called to exhibit compassion for nonhumans and to care for the cosmic common good because they are our very self. The Buddhist principle of interbeing or interdependence thus heightens the Catholic impetus to express solidarity to nonhuman creatures by integrating them into the deeper instinct for self-preservation. The similarities and differences between Catholic social thought and engaged Buddhism suggest that by engaging with and preserving multiplicity between traditions, interreligious ecological ethics might support the overall ecological vision of both but also generate new content for each.

IV. Methods

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[23] Ibid., 53.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 13-14.

While these purely conceptual insights are valuable, an investigation of their common methodological approaches suggests another insight: all four theologians, operating out of their particular religious traditions, also offer a parallel and non-endemic mode of access to their ecologically reconstructed conceptions, and I suggest that they do so based on their personal engagement with specific ecological issues.

John Hart, for example, was instrumental in helping draft *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*, a pastoral letter from the Catholic Bishops of the Pacific Northwest. The bishops led a three-year process of collaborative listening, drawing in the perspectives of businesses, fishers, indigenous peoples, religious groups, environmentalists, state and federal agencies, and others. This led to an understanding of the common good that, while rooted in a Catholic sacramental ontology, can still call non-Catholics to learn about and to sustain the mutual flourishing of humans and their bioregions. In his own work, Hart looks to American Indian peoples and traditions, including personal interviews he conducted with Philip Deere, Muskogee elder, to complement the general description of a sacramental universe he develops via the Christian tradition.[26]

Before becoming a theologian, Jame Schaefer spent many years as a biologist and environmentalist addressing issues such as where to site repositories for high-level radioactive waste (through the U.S. Department of Energy), assessing the risks of Superfund sites, and participating in numerous consultations and working groups regarding the health of the Great Lakes. In her work, then, Schaefer updates classical Christian theologians via "evolutionary and molecular biological findings" as well as "ecosystem science."[27] For Hart and Schaefer, a Catholic cosmic common good derives from a theocentric understanding of the universe, but it can also be grounded on and intensified through engagement with non-Christian traditions.

In addition to being a Buddhist teacher, Joanna Macy is also famous as an anti-nuclear activist, creating a "nuclear guardianship program" to enable people to engage mindfully the magnitude of human responsibility in safeguarding nuclear waste that lasts for millennia. In her formulation of interdependence, then, Macy merges Buddhist principles with the philosophical school of general systems thinking, and she describes no-self and rebirth through terms of evolutionary theory rather than merely Buddhist ones.

Finally, while not active on a single ecological issue, Nhat Hanh's community at Plum Village embodies active concern for the Earth as residents and visitors compost and recycle, plant native plants, use energy-efficient light bulbs, drive community owned electric or vegetable-oil-powered vehicles, and once a week practice No-Car Day. In his meditations and descriptions of mindful living, Nhat Hanh articulates interdependence

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[26] For Hart, both Christian and American Indian visions of a sacramental universe offer ways of "caring for creation as a whole and as specific creatures." Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 41.

[27] Schaefer, "Environmental Degradation," 84.

such that it might provoke care and concern for all creatures, yet may also be adopted by non-Buddhists as well.

V. Conclusion

I suggest that for each of these four Catholic and Buddhist thinkers, the motivation to revise and expand theological concepts derives from each theologian's active involvement in ecological movements and their dialogue with non-endemic sources. This suggests an important methodological insight: interreligious ecological ethics must be engaged in concrete issues and not merely be textual or academic. Engaging in ecological praxis leads to a methodological approach that privileges crossing ideological boundaries and incorporating the terms and concepts of another discipline or religious tradition. Interreligious work on climate change offers the opportunity to expand both one's theological conceptions and also the range of collaborators on a common ethical goal, and the conceptual insights gained from this kind of dialogue may not only render the tradition's doctrines more intellectually plausible, but it may also solidify a trans-religious foundation for working towards sustainable responses.

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Interreligious Responses to Climate Change: Some Suggestions
By Pim Valkenberg

In his opening remarks, Anthony Watson made a very helpful observation concerning the different yet connected ways in which scholars involved in interreligious studies and those involved in comparative theology might work together. Since this is the first joint panel session[1] for the Comparative Theology Group and the Interreligious and Interfaith Studies Group at the AAR, it makes sense to start my response by making a few suggestions concerning the possible collaboration of scholars involved in the two groups before I address the four papers and their contents individually.

Watson described those who are involved in comparative theology as scholars who are engaged in a form of solidarity between traditions, while those who are involved in interreligious and interfaith studies are engaged in a form of solidarity through joint action. So while both groups share an engagement in relationships between religions and forms of faith, the focus and the horizon of this engagement is different. In the case of comparative theology, the focus is clearly academic in nature, while the horizon is a better understanding of a different religious tradition, which will also enable a fresh perspective on one's own religious "home" tradition. In the case of interreligious and interfaith studies, the focus is not on traditions but on human beings who get to know one another across religious boundaries, and the horizon is often working together not only for a better understanding, but also for a better world. So, the question of interreligious responses to climate change will be answered differently by representatives of the two groups. Comparative theologians will first and foremost try to delve up new approaches from the traditions with which they are familiar, while those working in interfaith studies will look for new ways to actively engage with the consequences of climate change.

Quite possibly I have widened the gap between the two approaches too much, but I did so in order to show how they can work together because of this different orientation. Comparative theologians who want to address contemporary questions need to think about how their work will actually help those who want to actively engage religious traditions in giving answers that will help us to contribute to a better world; interfaith activists who want to be grounded in the faith traditions with which they work will need the results of comparative studies of these traditions in order for their proposed action to be fruitful. And again, some of us will want to work across religious boundaries in various ways at the same time, combining work in comparative theology, theology of religions, and interreligious studies. In fact, any worthwhile interreligious dialogue will need all of this.

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[1] Editors' note: this panel conversation included two additional papers not included here, "Seinaru Hoshi (Sacred Planet): A Comparative Theology of Ecology for Shinto-Christian Dialogue," from Loye Ashton and "On Divine (Im)Passibility and Ecological Degradation: Islamic Constributions to Christian Theology," from Michael VanZandt Collins.

Before I respond to the four papers that have been discussed in this panel, I would like to show how I see the relationship between comparative theology and dialogue studies. First of all, for me as a Catholic theologian, both forms of theology are made possible by the events leading up to and flowing forth from the Second Vatican Council and its declaration *Nostra Aetate.* In that sense, there is an evident connection between different forms of interreligious reading and interreligious learning after Vatican II.[2]

But how does the relationship between comparative theology and dialogue studies work in practice? I see a parallel with one of the characteristics of liberation theology, namely that it is a second act of reflection that follows on a practice. For me, the practice is interreligious dialogue and comparative theology is a form of reflection that follows from taking my dialogue partners serious. There is a deep theological conviction involved that I hope is somewhat based on the story of the Men of Emmaus in the Gospel according to Luke: the strangers that we encounter in our journey through life are not just random strangers but may be bearers of a message from God. If that is true – since it is a theological conviction I cannot prove it, but it can turn out to be a good guidance in following Christ faithfully – it gives a theological grounding to the common idea that we can learn from the other about ourselves in dialogue. In this manner I have studied the works of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and of Fethullah Gülen because I discovered that my dialogue partners were inspired by them.[3] In a similar way, the basic idea of the book that I hope to be able to write about the qur'anic critique of the so-called "People of the Book" came when I was studying an Iranian contemporary scholar of *tafsir* (qur'anic exegesis). The metaphor that he used to describe the attitude of Jews and Christians towards the new revelation from God in the Qur'an helped me to understand what Paul in the New Testament meant when he critiqued a certain use of the Jewish law. I started reading this particular exegete in preparation of a lecture that I was to give together with an Iranian scholar who had written about him and recommended him for our comparative study. In this way, actual dialogues help me to find the topics for my comparative research.

Having made these introductory remarks, I will now turn to the four papers presented in this panel. The challenge of finding the proper dialogue partners or the proper traditions and texts for comparison is addressed in all papers differently, and I think this is a challenge that requires some further thinking in order to prevent the impression that the

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[2] See David F. Ford and Frances Clemson, eds., *Interreligious Reading after Vatican II: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology and Receptive Ecumenism* (Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell, 2013; = *Modern Theology* 29/4).

[3] I give a comparative theological reading of their works in chapters 7 and 8 of my book *Sharing Lights on the Way to God: Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Theology in the Context of Abrahamic Partnership* (New York–Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2006). See also the final chapter of my forthcoming *Renewing Islam by Service: A Christian View of Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

choice of partners and texts depends on the personal preferences of the researcher. The theological conviction about the stranger as being sent to me by God in order to learn about myself and the other (and about God as stranger, according to Luke) means that I need to start thinking about "choice" in a different way. David Burrell has taught me that it is possible to think of "choice" in a way that is theologically more significant when we say farewell to the illusion of "free choice" and instead limit ourselves to the idea of created freedom as it is expressed in the three Abrahamic traditions.[4]

In the case of Ian Mevorach's paper, the two partners in dialogue are determined by their participation in a conference on Spirit and Nature in 1990: Sallie McFague and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Yet their partnership and its problems is less determined by their respective theological traditions than by their different attitudes towards these traditions. Sallie McFague is well-known as a theologian who likes to mold existing theological traditions and adapt them to a new ecological consciousness, such as her famous metaphor of the world as the body of God.[5] Her approach reminds me of the decade-long process of *Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation* that was shepherded by the World Council of Churches in the 1990s. For Seyyed Hossein Nasr, it is not at all necessary to reconsider or to adapt the tradition, since he thinks that the tradition safeguards us against the errors of modernity, and therefore he is one of the leaders of a group that is known as the "perennialists." As Mevorach observes, this difference in theological style and attitude makes a real dialogue between them almost impossible. I do think that it is possible to find resources in the Islamic tradition that may help us to approach the challenge of climate change by appealing to the qur'anic notion of *ayāt* as God's signs in nature. If it is possible to discern God as creator by a careful observation of the signs in nature, as the Qur'an so often says, it should certainly be possible to pay attention to the changes in the signs of nature as warning signs that something is changing in the symbols attesting the work of the Creator. However, Mevorach's paper evokes the question as to whether we need to find common ground between the two traditions on this point. The notion of a common ground is often presupposed among others in the many initiatives following on the so-called Common Word document by a number of Muslim scholars.[6]

However, I think that it is not at all necessary to suppose a "neutral" common ground between the two religions – I think I can even show that the verse from the Qur'an on which the Common Word is based does not even require such a common ground – and

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[4] See chapter two, "Relating Divine Freedom with Human Freedom: Diverging and Converging Strategies," in David B. Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) 25-49.

[5] Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987).

[6] See Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans, 2010).

the method of comparative theology is in a better position to do justice to the otherness of the foreign tradition by not presupposing such a common ground. The problem is of course that such a refusal to presuppose a common ground may be seen as a refusal of dialogue by those who think that dialogue requires looking for commonalities. However, I think that we might need to widen or even correct the contemporary concept of dialogue and include in it elements such as apologetics and maybe even disputation that have historically been closely associated with what we now call dialogue. Some of these processes may be able to safeguard the specificities of the traditions involved better. Which brings me to Loye Ashton's paper.

Ashton begins by saying that there is not much dialogue between Shinto and Christian practitioners. He is right of course that we have our usual canon of partners in interreligious dialogue: Buddhists and Muslims might be our most frequent dialogue partners, and Jews and Hindus as well. But most of us – certainly along the East coast of the USA – do not entertain frequent dialogues with East Asians, and if we do so, it is usually with Confucians or Taoists. So it is good to hear from Dr. Ashton about the Shinto approach to our "sacred planet." One of the things he points out is the importance of our relationship with the non-human environment such as water and earth. He sketches what he calls a sacramental awareness in the Shinto rituals that comes close to an environmental awareness. In the science of religion we have a long tradition of discarding such relationships with the non-human (and even non-animal) elements in nature by using the category of "animism" with the suggestion that this is a "primitive" religious feeling that needs to be overcome by more developed "ethical" perspectives. Dr. Ashton makes clear how representatives of such a "sacramental awareness" have their doubts about the Western, usually "Christian" commitment to climate awareness. Again this shows how our mainly ethical approach to the issue of climate change does not always work in interreligious relationships and sometimes even evokes some mistrust. That does not mean that ethical perspectives are useless – in our discussion, some basic ethical questions about the role of Shinto rituals in Japanese nationalism came up – but we need to be mindful of the fact that these perspectives do not form the only possible approach to climate change. Again, this teaches us something about the boundaries of our usual canon, both as to dialogue partners and as to modes of approaching issues.

Daniel Scheid's paper is probably the contribution to our panel that most clearly touches on a form of activist engagement sketched by Dr. Watson. This is true not only because of his choice of dialogue partners – the Catholic tradition of the common good and engaged Buddhism – but also because of his own engagement with these traditions. I am grateful that he taught me once again about *pratitya samutpada,* the principle of co-dependent origination, and I noticed that he offered four different translations while I'm most familiar with a fifth one. When I teach Buddhism to my undergraduate students, I always have trouble explaining this properly, even though I sense how important this is as explanation of the doctrine of no-self. So, it is clear how engaged Buddhism and Catholic Christianity rely on two really different worldviews, and yet there is an analogy – or, as

Scheid formulates, a shared conceptual ground – between two principles, the common good and the co-dependent origination that allows for a similar approach to climate change. So, the teleology implicit in the very notion of "creation" and the co-dependence implied by the absence of a self form two ways to attain a stronger solidarity with the common good of all the worlds, not only the human world. After all, the Buddhist symbol of the "wheel of life" shows us how the world of humans is just one of the six principal domains of living.

Finally, Michael VanZandt Collins gives us a very different approach once again to the challenge of climate change by discussing the doctrine of divine *impassibilitas.* This doctrine tries to steer away from the idea that God suffers and as such it has been the subject of a debate between the committee on doctrine of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops on the one hand and Sister Elizabeth Johnson on the other. It is clear how a theology that wants to do justice to our ecological environment has trouble with the idea that God cannot suffer or – more properly translated – cannot react to or be touched by what happens in creation. In order to give an antidote against such a seemingly arcane God, VanZandt Collins focuses on Jalaluddin Rumi's story of the parrot and the merchant. It is clear that God in Rumi's poetry is very much an affected God, a passionate and suffering lover as Rumi himself was if we may believe the biographical stories about him.

Now it might be easy to object to VanZandt Collins that there is hardly any value in using Rumi for a comparative study since he is not at all representative for mainstream Islam. Therefore it might be good to go back to the Qur'an as the foundational Scripture of Islam. Even though the God of the Qur'an is as transcendent and non-suffering and unmoved as can be, certain remarks in the Qur'an seem to suggest otherwise. Among the so-called "beautiful names of God" (*asma al-husna)* is the name *al-Tawwab*, which is usually explained as "the One who accepts repentence" or "the One who relents time and again." Yet the word can be interpreted as not only to mean that God makes us repent time and again, but also that God turns time and again toward forgiveness.[7] So the notion of *tawba*, repentance, does not only imply that we turn back towards God, but also that God turns toward us in order to forgive. On the other hand, the Qur'an also tells quite often about Prophet Noah and the flood, and some of these stories seem to imply that God is sorry for having created these faithless human beings and wants to wipe them out.[8] This is certainly a passionate God, albeit with another kind of passion. Even though we need to be careful with anthropomorphic language, it makes sense to talk about God as lover, as Rumi did, or about God as passionate in both forgiving and not forgiving when human beings threaten to ruin both social and ecological relations, in order to prevent our interreligious approaches to the challenge of climate change from becoming one-dimensional and moralistic.

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[7] See, for instance, Qur'an 2:128; 4:64; 9:118 and 49:12.
[8] See, among others, Qur'an 11:44; 23:27; and surah 71.

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Dialoguing with a Dialogue Pioneer:
A Brief Interview with Leonard Swidler
By Or N. Rose

Leonard Swidler is Founder and President of the Dialogue Institute, as well as Founding Editor of the Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. He is Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue in the Religion Department of Temple University. The author or editor of numerous scholarly and popular works, his recently published* [Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding: Strategies for the Transformation of Culture-Shaping Institutions](#) *(Palgrave MacMillan, 2015). Fittingly, this volume inaugurates Palgrave's new book series in* Interreligious Studies in Theory and Practice (ISTP)*. In this brief interview, Rabbi Or Rose, Co-Director of CIRCLE, and a member of the editorial committee of* ISTP*, invites Dr. Swidler to reflect on his pioneering work in the field of interreligious dialogue and the future of this evolving discipline.*

ONR – You have been involved in interreligious dialogue for well over 50 years. How did you enter the field?

LS – Unconsciously, my entrance into the field of Interreligious Dialogue (IRD) began 87 years ago in my mother's womb when my Ukrainian-Jewish father's sperm encountered the ovum of my Irish-Catholic mother, and nine months later I was born in Sioux City, Iowa. It consciously began when I chose as my doctoral dissertation topic (in cultural history at the University of Wisconsin) on the "Una Sancta Movement," the Catholic-Protestant dialogue that began in Germany, the land of the Reformation, after World War I. That movement was a major force leading to Vatican Council II and its Copernican turn away from triumphalism to dialogue (see: *The Ecumenical Vanguard*, Duquesne University Press, 1963). Arlene Anderson Swidler and I married and went to Germany in 1957 for three years of research and teaching, and shortly after Vatican II began in 1962. Arlene said to me: "There is no scholarly journal in the U.S. devoted to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue; maybe we should start one." We did. The first issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* appeared in 1964, containing articles by two of the most influential theologians alive today: Hans Küng and Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI, emeritus).

ONR – What has surprised you most over the course of your career as a scholar and practitioner of interreligious dialogue?

LS – What surprised me the most in all my years of this work has been the ongoing and expanding commitment of Catholics to dialogue: ecumenical (intra-Christian), interreligious, and inter-ideological dialogue. After centuries of gazing inward, there was a great turn to the wider world, beginning with other Christians. When that shift was made it carried with it its own internal momentum, and so it became clear that we must turn to the next dialogue partner: Jews and Judaism. Then, if we were dialoguing with our older sibling, why not also do the same with our younger one: Muslims and Islam? But why stop

there? So on to Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucianists… agnostics and atheists. This movement has certainly not always been simple or straightforward, but it is real and quite amazing! I could not have anticipated such developments as a young Catholic seventy years ago.

ONR – What developments would you like to see in the next 50 years in the field of interreligious dialogue (scholarly, educational, organizational, etc.)?

LS – We need to both *deepen* and *expand* our dialogue. The deepening needs to include making our dialogues truly transformative, including critical thinking. After all, *dia-logos* means *thinking* (*logos)* together (*dia)*! But we must also be attentive to our emotional intelligence. We know that our emotions play a critical role in how we think, process, and act. Then, we must close the loop by taking thoughtful action in line with the previous dialogical elements. I write about this cycle—"head, heart, and hands"—in detail in the new Palgrave volume, *Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding*. For those familiar with my work, there I assemble many of the pieces I have written or presented over the years about Deep-Dialogue/Critical-Thinking/Emotional-Intelligence/and Competitive-Cooperation. Here, I just wish to add that all of this integrative work needs to happen on both the individual and the communal levels. This requires us to think carefully about education broadly conceived: both what happens in formal learning environments, but also how we utilize the full range of our culture apparatus. This is how we will build the *Camino Real* (Royal Highway), moving toward the never-attained goal of transforming the world from a *house* to a *home* for a fully authentic humanity.

ONR – What advice do you have for a person seeking to work as an interreligious professional?

LS – I would point first of all to what I said in "nugatory" fashion above. Work to make all of those elements increasingly real in your *personal* life, and then in your *professional* life. Anything less is a truncated humanity. Second, keep in mind the "multiplier principle," that is, think of how you can best maximize your impact as a dialogue professional. Try, for example, not to just train ten people, but also to get those ten to train ten others, and so on… Not easy, but worth expending energy on such strategic thinking. "Networking" is dialogue on the social level. Third, make the maximum use of your specific talents and skills. All different groups of persons and all different areas of activity need to be brought into the dialogue. Utilizing your gifts will allow you to bring dimensions of reality into the dialogue that can be reached only by those talents and skills, and perhaps only by *you* in this time and place. Finally, recognize that you are very fortunate to be coming of age just now, for the world clearly is at a tipping point; we are entering into the "Age of Global Dialogue," which is radically different from all preceding ages. Just as historians look back now and see the period 800-200 BCE as a period of radical shift (the "Axial Age"), future historians will look back and see this dawning Age of Global Dialogue as a period of profound shift, a grand movement from monologue to dialogue.