

Honouring Robert J. Schreiter's Contributions to Intercultural Theology

Guest Editorial

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From Nebraska to Nijmegen to Chicago, and many miles around the globe, Professor Robert J. Schreiter C.P.P.S. has engaged in and set the stage for major interdisciplinary conversations between cultures and theology, world church, and areas of global concern. His always sound mappings of discussions, frameworks and new proposals on a range of topics relevant for Intercultural Theology, have become the impressive mark of his academic career, paired with extensive travel, key notes at many conferences and global engagements.

Given his recent seventieth birthday, the authors of this collection of articles seek to make a contribution to a public recognition of the person and work of Robert J. Schreiter. We want to express our great appreciation for his many important contributions to theology and related fields. Yet above all we want to publicly thank Bob—as we will call him from here on—for the great dedication with which he has made his many gifts and talents so generously available in numerous ways and to so many people, among whom the contributors of these articles.

Obviously, as a leading academic in Intercultural and Catholic Theology, Bob Schreiter has had a long and deep impact in these and related fields, either as teacher of generations of students at his institutional home of Chicago's Catholic Theological Union (CTU), or as guest lecturer at many institutions around the world. He has published widely in books and articles, and shaped theological discussions by his service on many editorial and advisory boards. In North America he has been instrumental in introducing the work of the important Belgian theologian Edward Schillebeeckx, and his early publications on inculturations and contextualization, especially *Constructing Local Theologies* (1985), are landmarks in missiology and intercultural theology. Schreiter has also been actively involved in such other areas as practical theology, congregation studies, etc. Unlike most scholars, however, Bob Schreiter has also been very active beyond the

academy, especially as facilitator of conflict resolution and processes of reconciliation for churches and communities around the world that have been affected by violent conflict. Schreiter has also fulfilled important leadership roles in his religious order, the Society of the Precious Blood. We refer here further to the article of Bob's friend and colleague Steve Bevans, who gives an excellent overview of Schreiter's contributions in many of these areas.

One way in which Bob Schreiter has helped shape Intercultural and Catholic Theology is perhaps less well known. It is this work, namely as advisor to graduate students around the world, that we would like to lift up by means of this collection of essays. Schreiter's home institution (CTU) does not offer programs on the Doctorate of Philosophy or Theology level, but it does run a program for the Doctorate of Ministry and Bob has served as advisor to many of its graduates. Moreover, many of the students in CTU's different Master programs have continued to further graduate studies, and Bob has often continued to be involved in their work at other institutions. Bob Schreiter has also served directly as doctoral advisor to many PhD candidates at the other schools of the Theological Consortium in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, such as the Lutheran School of Theology, McCormick Presbyterian Seminary, and at the internationally renowned Divinity School of the University of Chicago. As guest professor at the Catholic Theological University of Nijmegen—where he received his own graduate education—Bob Schreiter for several years contributed to a graduate program that trained and graduated a large number of promising young scholars, many of them from the global South. Finally, as leading international scholar in theology Bob Schreiter has served as doctoral advisor on PhD committees at universities around the world, including in Germany, Scandinavia and The Netherlands. The contributors to this volume represent several of the ways in which Bob Schreiter has generously helped young scholars develop their own skills and voices. We are all deeply grateful for his teaching, advising, and continued support.

That Bob himself sees this "Schülerkreis" as an important aspect of his work became clear on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday, when he expressed the wish to celebrate this milestone by means of a symposium at which his former students would share some of their own scholarship. Many of those former students met for the first time at this celebratory symposium at CTU in January 2013. From that group also grew this special issue in the aftermath of Bob's seventieth birthday, to which many of us are honored to contribute. Each of us

would like to wholeheartedly thank Bob for the many ways in which his teaching, his scholarship, and his mentorship have helped shape us to become the teachers and scholars we are today.

In his very insightful overview and interpretation of Schreiter's work, "Doing Theology in 'Second Modernity,'" Bob's colleague Steve Bevans offers a good overview of Bob Schreiter's life and career. Employing the cultural framework of second modernity, he describes the erudite and wide-ranging nature of Schreiter's scholarship, its deep rootedness in lived experience, including in close-up knowledge of situations of violence, vulnerability and courage around the world, and its Christological theological character. Bevans also points to the spiritual character in Schreiter's work, flowing from a spirituality of solidarity and hope of the order of the Precious Blood, to which Schreiter belongs. Furthermore, drawing on analysis of the sociologist Ulrich Beck, Bevans situates this spirituality in relation to an experience of the world that is deeply marked by violence against vulnerable peoples and nature, much of it related to processes of globalization and second modernity. This violence forms the context for Schreiter's theological commitments to the God of compassion and reconciliation that is encountered in the cross of Jesus. Steve Bevans concludes with a discussion of the development of Bob Schreiter's work on reconciliation and peacebuilding in the last decennia.

Culture and theology engagement

Within theological circles, Robert Schreiter stands out for his extensive culture theory and theology engagement. A number of articles explore and extend some of Schreiter's contributions in this regard, bringing it to new terrains. In his essay, "The Translational Fabric of Mission and Culture: Engaging Cross-Cultural Theologies on Translation," Norbert Hintersteiner revisits Schreiter's work on contextual theology to explore his reservation with theory and theology of cross-cultural translation and to hint us to an untapped potential in this respect, pointing us to Schreiter's early and pioneering interest in the cultural semiotics of the so-called Moscow-Tartu school around Yuri Lotman of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Interestingly, while Schreiter early on studied and drew on Eastern (Russian) cultural semiotics with its rich key concepts for his cultural analysis and theological proposals (especially in discussions of cultural signs, codes, boundary, cultural memory, identity, etc.), he did not engage more deeply in the semiotic theory of translation figured therein. The essay therefore, on the one hand, reviews the missional discourse of cross-cultural translation (Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh and Kwame

Bediako) and its critiques from contextual theology (Stephan Bevans and Robert Schreiter), explaining his reservation. On the other hand, it offers a window to translation in cultural semiotics (Yuri Lotman) and recent translation studies with its foundational as well as fluid concept of translation, not dissimilar to Schreiter's later understanding of globalized culture, suggesting it as potential terrain for future theologies of cross-cultural translation.

In "Mission Tracks in the Bush: Theological Reflections on Two Aboriginal Missions in Nineteenth-Century Australia," Gemma Tulud Cruz discusses two aboriginal missions in nineteenth century Australia, the New Norcia Mission in Western Australia in 1846-1900 and the Lutheran Mission in South Australia in 1838-1853. Cruz explores the missionaries' attitudes towards the indigenous cultures and the ways in which they mediated between the colonial government, the settlers, and the Aborigines to try and prevent the latter's extermination and disintegration, but also sought to curtail their nomadic lifestyle in order to be more successful in their missionary and – what they saw as – civilizing work. In her discussion Cruz explores the multifaceted, ambivalent and sometimes contradictory nature of the missionaries' work. Using Schreiter's work on inculturation as a heuristic lens, she offers theological reflections with regard to the missionaries' attitudes towards the Aborigines and their contributions to the inculturation of the gospel in their cultures.

In her article "Decolonizing Western Christianity for a Genuine Catholicity of Culture," Susan Abraham carefully probes Bob Schreiter's work on culture, local theologies, and catholicity for its significance for postcolonial theologies of culture. While Schreiter himself has long been uncomfortable with some forms of postcolonial critique for their agonistic understanding of culture, his work on culture, cultural identity, and intercultural dynamics has both anticipated and benefitted from postcolonial analyses of culture. Abraham credits Schreiter with de-centering Western Christianity as the necessary first step in any decolonizing project. In his early work on popular religion she sees the first constructive use of subalternity in Catholic theology. Moreover, Schreiter's attention for the role of power in culture and for economic, social and political analyses of globalization in "The New Catholicity" also resonates with the focus of postcolonial theologies of culture that aim to decolonize. Indeed, Abraham sees herself extending Schreiter's understanding of "catholicity" through the spiritual practice of deconstructing "culture" as the basis of a postcolonial theology, thus challenging him to reconsider his skepticism of postmodern critiques.

In deconstruction, she not only recognizes the postcolonial practice of undoing Western imperial epistemologies and identities, but also possibilities for a spirituality that is open to transcendence and the divine. Critical of contextual theologies' underlying assumptions that continue modern notions of identity, she instead draws on Kevin Hart's notion of catholicity. Exploring an understanding of catholicity that negotiates non-binary between Self and Other, Abraham sees Hart's deconstructive work align with Schreiter's own emphasis on communication over the antagonism of identity politics, while still enabling necessary decolonizing challenges to unequal power flows in local and global social structures.

Theology in racial and resource conflicts

Over more than twenty years during his career, Bob Schreiter has contributed as an academic with reflection, discernment and spiritual guidance to local and regional actors, groups and church leaders to processes of reconciliation and peacebuilding after conflict in all six continents. His parallel resulting studies in reconciliation and peacebuilding (Schreiter 1992, 2010) not only offer much considered and adopted interdisciplinary theoretical and theological frameworks, but are also profoundly contextual and praxis-oriented. They deal with questions that enkindle constructive social engagement in settings that are marked by deeply-rooted conflict and violence. Some of the essays here draw on this contribution of his.

For Kevin P. Considine, Schreiter's groundbreaking work on the connection between theological discourse and intercultural hermeneutics is a sound foundation for a theological project that engages culture and its connection to globalization and racialization within the United States. His essay, "Can 'Dangerous Memories' be Communicated? Extending Insights from the Intercultural Theology of Robert J. Schreiter into Dialogue with Subculture and Racialization," extends insights from Bob's work to bear upon the theological problem within the US context of communicating "dangerous memories" of racialized suffering: He draws on Schreiter's insights regarding semiotics and intercultural hermeneutics and brings them to the concepts of subculture and racialization. This allows him to show light on the aberrant theological anthropology conferred through racialization—and its dehumanizing hierarchy of race that offers and prohibits access to the benefits of globalized society depending upon one's entrance into "whiteness"—and semiotically focusing upon culture and subculture as the locations through which communication is possible. Considine concludes that such approach assists theological

communication of “dangerous memories” of racialized suffering and offer a re-humanizing reinterpretation of the signs, codes, and messages that are intertwined with phenotype.

In his article, “Racism and ‘Place’ in American Catholic Experience: Resources for Reconciliation in Asian American Communities,” Linh Hoang draws on Schreiter’s understanding of the process of reconciliation to engage the “uncomfortable places” of racism experienced by Asian Americans in the United States. As Asian Americans have built enclaves in order to maintain their cultural identity and help in resettlement, these ethnic enclaves have become a way to silence and sideline Asians from the racial debates that has traditionally pitted blacks and whites for centuries. Asians have assimilated well into the dominant white culture, but have not been completely accepted. Instead, they continue to experience discrimination and prejudices. Even in the Church, Asian American Catholics struggle for recognition of their contribution and participation. Linh Hoang proposes that Schreiter’s understanding of the process of reconciliation provides an opportunity to engage in transforming the racial cultural location of Asians. In particular, he is interested in exploring how Asian American Catholics can engage in the racial conversation while improving the Church’s place in healing racism.

In his article, “Mining for Christ: Eco-Justice in Contexts of Resource Extraction,” Jan Hendrik Pranger discusses the impacts of extractive industries on churches and communities in North Dakota and South Africa. Christian theology and ethics has only recently begun to take notice of the impacts that resourcing the material demands of human civilization has on the mostly rural communities where most of these materials are extracted. The abrupt, radical, and often violent impact of the extractive industries – specifically hydraulic fracking for shale oil in North Dakota and mining for platinum in South Africa – has reshaped not only the physical and natural landscape in these locations but also transforms the social and religious landscapes in these locations. The often-conflictual nature of these transformations—greatly benefitting some in these communities, while being deeply detrimental to others—occasions the need for a social analysis as part of a theological response. Yet such an analysis cannot be restricted to concerns within the local communities. In both locations, resource extraction directly intersects with social, economic, and racial fault lines that already exist between Indigenous peoples and settlers of European descent, and that often become more pronounced by the impacts of resource extraction, e.g., the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Standing Rock protests. Moreover,

in both cases resource extraction is part of globalizing processes that include economic inequality, international migration, and climate change. In the concluding section, Pranger begins to explore some theological ideas that may help guide further theological and ethical responses to the concerns raised by resource extraction.

Probing New Catholicity in a globalized world

The final set of essays deals with Schreiter's proposal for an intercultural theological framework in a global era, for a theology between the local and the global: New Catholicity. Jeffrey Kirch in his essay "A Lived Catholicity: The Ecclesiologies of Pope Francis and Robert J. Schreiter", explores several ecclesiological key concepts of the New Catholicity prospect and brings them into conversation with ecclesiological tendencies as expressed by Pope Francis during his ongoing papacy. The author stresses that both, Pope Francis and Robert Schreiter, recognize that the world has been profoundly affected by conflict, globalization, and the breakdown of relationships on multiple levels, requiring the engagement of the world church. Specifically, their understandings of the missionary nature of the Church and of catholicity in a new sense prove to be key concepts in the Church's response to our contemporary world.

Inspired by Bob's contribution to the understanding of 'new catholicity' amidst processes of globalization, Henry Kuo in his essay, "A New Reformed Catholicity: Catholicity and Confessing in Reformed Ecclesiology," proposes a Reformed understanding of catholicity centered on confession and social justice. The challenge for a Reformed ecclesiology that aspires to catholicity, Kuo contends, is to transcend the local Christian experience in a genuine embrace of otherness that must also be found globally in other communities, cultures, and religions. The heart of Reformed Catholicity is for the church to embody a humanizing wholeness that brings God to humanity, and to dignify humanity by bringing it closer to God. By its nature, therefore, such an understanding of catholicity needs to acknowledge the intercultural and polydoxical character of the gospel. Most importantly, like Schreiter, Kuo believes that the church needs to position itself in relation to the asymmetries and challenges of globalization. The church's primary instrument he sees in the Reformation's idea of confession, understood as a practice of memory, commitment, and eschatological hope. Such a practice, he argues, does not begin with the traditions the church considers its pillars, but with the dark and dangerous memories that inconvenience the standard operating procedures of the church; that is, with re-membering those on the fringes or outside of the church.

An example of such a practice Kuo sees in the South African Belhar Confession's explicit acknowledgement of the apartheid's church sin of limiting catholicity in the name of race.

In his contribution, "Identity of Catholic Schools in Multi-religious Contexts," Edmund Kee-Fook Chia discusses how Catholic educational institutions around the world are responding to the multi-cultural and multi-religious communities that in the last half century have come to inhabit its schools and universities. Drawing upon Schreiter's arguments for local theologies, Chia addresses how to express and measure the identity and mission of Catholic institutions in these new contexts, while taking seriously the teachings of the Church on the role they play in its evangelizing mission. He observes that Catholic institutions have often been willing to make accommodation in areas of language, dress-code, hairstyle, food, festivals and celebrations, school-amenities, and rituals and practices in the name of cultural differences. Yet in the area of religious education there is still work to be done. Chia argues for tending to the five constitutive elements of the mission of the Church as defined by the Vatican's document on Dialogue and Mission, including the creation of a culture of dialogue that encompasses dialogues of life, of action, of theological exchange, and of a dialogue of religious experiences.

Honoring Robert J. Schreiter's contribution with this set of articles, readers are invited to explore further the three main areas of intercultural theological engagement often associated with his scholarship: culture theory and theology; peace building and reconciliation; and "New Catholicity" as his proposal for an intercultural theological framework in a globalized world. His books mapping these engagements and resulting from (*Constructing Local Theologies; Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*; and *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*) have found translations in many languages. Bob's pioneering contributions to these areas of intercultural theology have become in multiple ways guiding windows and inspiration for many who had the opportunity to work with him or encountered him at various locations and in distinct ways during his more than four decades of a globally engaging and impactful scholarship. *Ad multos anos*.

References

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