Continuing the Conversation

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

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This issue of *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* (ISIT) presents a variety of discussions in the field of interreligious studies and intercultural Theology. The rationale for this wide diversity is that each article covers a field of study that deserves fuller inquiry.

The first article by Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook reflects on the emerging field of interrituality studies. In fact, this article continues the conversation started in the last ISIT issue. Kujawa-Holbrook reflects especially on how the study of interrituality adds to interfaith studies as it opens up numerous new inquiries and opportunities for civic engagement, such as questions related to social justice and peacebuilding movements. The author also advises further study in large fields like those related to hospitality, interreligious learning, multiple religious belonging, rites of passage, and, the interplay between interreligious ritual practice and the use of sacred sites. Among other things, Kujawa-Holbrook argues for the use of case studies and a close examination of how sacred sites and spaces serve as venues of shared religious experiences. She also points out that in this context there are some glaring gaps, such as the study of rituals in secular and civic contexts and rites of passage, that are commonly ignored. She concludes that the articles in the Special Issue of ISIT (1.2, 2017) on interrituality demonstrate that the formation of relationships through interrituality not only contributes to an overall sense of community but also nurtures the experience of religions as hybrid and fluid.

Paul Hedges' article investigates the public sphere; he analyses what opportunities interreligious dialogue has through deliberative democracy. Grounding his observations in Singapore and the UK, two countries with very different religious populations, he discusses how both countries promote certain forms of interreligious dialogue to strengthen social cohesion. Although he comes to the conclusion that most of these activities do not fit neatly into the conceptions of deliberative democracy, there is a certain form of engagement

that does seem to have the potential to improve social cohesion; the so-called “dialogue of action.”

Staying within the British context, Audrey Allas’ article analyses the topic of religiously mixed marriage in Pakistani Muslim communities. Traditionally, these communities have relied on endogamous marital engagements to protect their property and wealth as well as their religious and social ideology. This strategy also safeguards against having to compromise their kinship structures. Hence, it is important that non-Muslims marrying into the community convert to Islam and, at a minimum, accept the group’s social and cultural practices. However, now that more Pakistani Muslims are choosing to marry non-Pakistanis, communities are forced to consider alternatives such as the restructuring of kinship relations and social mores.

Najib George Awad takes on a challenge given by the comparative theologian Francis X. Clooney, who remarked on the paucity of essays on comparative theology that include Muslim voices. For the most part, such essays focus on Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Awad’s essay concerns the theological writings of a Muslim theologian and a Christian theologian from the eighth/ninth century. These authors from the early Islamic era use a philosophical, rational approach to convince the other of the positive aspects of their respective religions. Carefully analyzing them, one of Awad’s main questions is how and if we can consider these early Islamic writings to be forms of what we today call comparative theology.

Continuing the theme of comparative theology, Jon Paul Sydnor’s essay aims at producing a constructive, comparative, and nondual theodicy for the Christian tradition based on the Hindu Vaiṣṇava tradition. Since in Vaiṣṇavism everything is an emanation of Viṣṇu, all that is can be understood as coming from Viṣṇu. This means that opposites are in fact complementary. As Sydnor writes, “good and bad, joy and suffering, pain and pleasure are not conflicting dualities; they are interdependent qualities that increase one another’s being” (87). If “ ‘opposites’ are interdependent, hence complementary, then they are not ‘opposites’ but mutually amplifying contrasts” (87). From the point of view of this ontology, pain, suffering, and death form an inherent part of the Divine for which love is the first principle: “love would demand their creation, because love would want abundant life for all” (87). Based on Vaiṣṇavism theology, Sydnor argues, the opposites of all that is good not only derive from the Divine but are the results of its love.

Finally, after the six book reviews, at the very end of this issue you will find the early announcement for the 2019 European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies (ESITIS) conference. The conference will be held in Sarajevo, April 24–27, 2019 and its guiding theme will be: **The Hope and Despair of Religions: Exploring the Nexus of Theory and Praxis.**