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Theology without Walls: The Transreligious Imperative, edited by Jerry L. Martin. Routledge, 2020. xviii + 250 pp., Pb., $48.95 US. ISBN: 978 1032088631

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Continuing the emergence of the Theology Without Walls (TWW) project, Jerry L. Martin brings together 22 accomplished theologically inclined scholars to reflect on a central aim among theological disciplines: "to know and articulate all we can about the divine or ultimate reality" for the purposes of TWW, without confining oneself to the "confessional restrictions" of any one tradition, worldview, or way of life (1). In five parts of four to five chapters each, the volume addresses the need for TWW, the role of experience and transformation in TWW, challenges to and possibilities arising from TWW, its place in multireligious and global contexts, and situating TWW among and within (and beyond) current confessional theologies. The 22 scholars overwhelmingly represent the Western world with all but one based in the United States. All but three are men, and the predominate academic fields of training, scholarship, and teaching are theology, philosophy, and the study of religion. These details about the contributors are not intended as criticisms but rather to convey the context from which the project of TWW is represented in this volume.

The Volume

As is the nature of review essays of books (brief) and edited volumes (substantive), it is unrealistic here to exhaustively cover all the content contained in the volume. Fortunately, a book review seeks not to replace the book itself. The volume's chapters are well written, concise, and provide the reader with a lot of bang for her buck.

Part One addresses the question of "Why Theology Without Walls?" with a response from Robert Cummings Neville to theological questions of ultimacy. He argues that a) "theologies *with* walls reduce to sociological claims," and b) "no one really trusts theologically walled-in answers" (12). Richard Oxenberg, addressing a TWW "in spirit and truth" unconfined by institution or tradition, suggests that "theology without walls as a practice and, indeed, as a commitment *itself* betokens a new revelation of the divine, one that, like all such revelations when they are authentic, has its own soteriological power" (23). Christopher Denny revisits Robert Bellah's "Sheila"

worldview and, in the context of religious pluralism and TWW, proclaims "rather than joining the chorus of those who see religious individualism and the decline of churches' social influence primarily as a problem, I choose to see the Sheilas of the world as providing contemporary societies with opportunities as well" (26). Kurt Anders Richardson concludes the part by suggesting TWW provides the hermeneutical space that makes "something" possible akin to "open-field theology to indicate the constructive hermeneutical project of 'theology' as a comprehensive, nonprescriptive association of theologians" (35).

Part Two considers "Experience and Transformation" with an opening chapter by John J. Thatamanil, who offers a conception of TWW that aims at "interreligious wisdom gained by means of engagement with not just the *claims* of other traditions but also their *ends* and the *means* to those ends" (53). Paul Knitter's chapter provides perhaps a case study of TWW by sketching his "own personal search for a spirituality that can be experimentally meaningful, intellectually coherent, and ethically responsible" (66), primarily in the context of Buddhist and Christian mutual learning. Peter Savastano offers an appealing image of seeking wisdom not only or always from the depths of a single 60-foot well but asks "why not *ten* 60-foot wells?" Rory McEntee emphasizes contemplative practices in an interspiritual approach to TWW, which he suggests can be a "benefit to the growing, but inchoate, spirituality of the 'spiritual but not religious' (SBNR)" (93). Jonathan Weidenbaum concludes Part Two on experience with an appropriate consideration of an open door and open window theology in the spirit of William James that "is always ready to draw upon the unique experiential insights of individuals as they have surfaced in different places and times – whether such heights of awareness are achieved through meditation, discovered in the throngs of a personal crisis, or even induced through chemicals" (105).

Part Three shifts to "Challenges and Possibilities" with an opening practical reflection on the workability of TWW from "sympathetic critic" Peter Feldmeier, who deems it "potentially a version of comparative theology," (112) among other things. Wesley J. Wildman and Jerry Martin's chapter follows with a case study about the TWW's method of considering the dizzying array of daunting choices present among cross-religious theological possibilities. Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz ask in their chapter what theologians can learn from the cognitive science of religion, while Wildman's chapter asks what TWW might learn from natural science.

Part Four, "Theologizing in a Multireligious World," commences with J.R. Hustwit's insightful hermeneutical approach to transreligious understanding and dialogue, in which he proposes four convincing theological

hypotheses for why "the only way to do theology is to do it transreligiously" (153). Paul Hedges explores what it might mean to adopt a "strategic religious participation" model in the West to better understand multiple religious belonging and identities, which remains important because it raises relevant questions for the everyday non-theologian. Jeanine Diller's chapter follows with a rigorous examination of the philosophical and practical coherence of religious affiliation and the doing of TWW. Diller argues that "it is *not* a contradiction in terms to affiliate and do TWW, both in a serious way" (172). In similar fashion, as Linda Mercadante's chapter explores, TWW remains relevant for SBNRs as well, for they may already be doing TWW by generating an SBNR theology.

Part Five concludes the volume by turning to "Expanded Confessional Theologies." S. Mark Heim's chapter explores the question of remaining committed to a particular religious tradition while also doing TWW. Heim suggests that "comparative theology is the best current concrete demonstration of that learning and the best example of TWW as an expanding confessional perspective" (208). Francis X. Clooney's chapter follows with an argument for a theology with walls but also with an open door and welcome mat. Jeffrey D. Long's chapter explores the Vedanta tradition of Ramakrishna and suggests that TWW "describes precisely what its adherents have been doing all along.... To its adherents, Vedanta is, in short, already an example of a" TWW (227). Hy-Dong Lee closes the volume with an intriguing example of doing TWW as "spontaneous" theological thinking amid the backdrop of South Korea's "diffuse" contemporary religious landscape.

At the 2020 virtual gathering of the American Academy of Religion annual conference, Jerry Martin challenged readers of the book to discern whether the argument for TWW is persuasive. It would seem there exists no single argument for TWW, but several. Far from being a liability, lacking a singular cohesive overriding argument seems rather appropriate for a project that seeks to do away with confining walls. More fundamentally, one might inquire about the very nature or spirit of TWW, the responses to which perhaps spawn several secondary questions (though no less important) such as: do the contributors to this volume, and the scholars involved in the TWW project, have a general and shared understanding of TWW? Is there a general or shared definition of the term in the subtitle, transreligious, and thus of transreligious theology? How ought one to distinguish TWW from interreligious theology? Does the term transreligious help or hinder one's approach to these questions? Does the lopsided gender ratio of the contributors shape TWW and if so, how? What implicit (and explicit) social forces play into socializing such a project? Is the very question about "walls" a uniquely Western question to begin with?

What historical individuals, events, communities, or traditions might those involved with TWW suggest we look to as embodying its spirit? Examples and hints are included throughout the volume. Perhaps a second volume can build on this question. In particular, what examples beyond the so-called "major world religions" might we look to, perhaps from Native and Indigenous traditions? Are there already traditions or movements, contemporary or historical, that we might interpret as – or perhaps they self-identify as – implicitly (or explicitly) doing TWW? For instance, Long's chapter offers the Vedanta tradition of Ramakrishna as one interesting non-Western example.

TWW and Comparative Theology

John Thatamanil offers one of the clearest definitions of the theologian without walls: one who seeks "to know ultimate reality not by rejecting spiritual disciplines of their home tradition but by supplementing those disciplines with others responsibly borrowed from other traditions" (55). If this is the case, then is a theologian without walls also a comparative theologian in the sense that they venture beyond their home tradition (if they have one) in order to learn? Do they then perhaps break with the comparative theological tradition by borrowing from non-home traditions to supplement their home tradition? As I understand it, generally, most comparative theologians do not borrow from other traditions but tend to place greater emphasis on learning more about their home tradition by crossing over into non-home traditions only to return with new eyes to see and generate new insights. But these fresh insights come from their home tradition in light of other traditions – hence, the distinction between comparative theology and TWW.

TWW and Interreligious Theology

Similarly, we might ask about the relation between TWW and interreligious theology, the latter of which is defined by Perry Schmidt-Leukel as "the form that theology assumes when it takes religious truth claims seriously, those of one's own religious tradition and those of all others. Taking them seriously means to search for possible truth in all of the religious testimonies" (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, 13). Thatamanil's definition of TWW above is strikingly similar. Is doing TWW akin to, or perhaps an exercise in, not just doing interreligious theology but doing it either without a home or a need to return home? Indeed, Thatamanil recognizes that the theologian doing TWW does, or can, have a home tradition. The point being made here, then,

is that, in recognizing the possibility (likelihood?) of having some implicit walls, the theologian without walls expresses that colloquial proverb made famous by the title of Jon Kabat-Zinn's 2005 book, "Wherever you go, there you are." That is, everyone is bound by whatever self-imposed or socially constructed walls they have built, whether they are conscious of them or not.

TWW and Transreligious Theology

An operative word in the book's subtitle is *transreligious*. What is the relation between TWW and transreligious theology? Again, Thatamanil addresses this question most directly: "a theologian without walls or the transreligious theologian is one who seeks to know the truth of ultimate reality by faithfully engaging in the spiritual disciplines of more than one religious tradition" (55). Does this assume the theologian doing TWW is a multiple religious belonger, participant, or observer, or perhaps a "strategic religious participant" (see Hedges' chapter)? Likewise, as a transreligious theologian, does the theologian doing TWW *trans*cend the traditions, practices, and disciplines being drawn from and, in so doing, generate a novel perspective? Are the terms transreligious, interreligious, and "without walls" synonymous, or can useful distinctions be identified between them? Some contributors seem to use the terms "interreligious" and "transreligious" interchangeably (and sometimes even "interreligious" is used synonymously with "multireligious"). It appears that most contributors probably consider all of the terms to be distinct to varying degrees. The question is raised here since the task of discerning whether any overall arguments for a TWW is persuasive can be frustrated or complicated by what appears to be some constructive disagreement over, or lack of clarity about, the use of language with regards to how the terms "interreligious," "transreligious," and sometimes "multireligious" qualify the doing of theology. In my view, "transreligious" can probably be distinguished from "interreligious" in some sense insofar as transreligious can be assumed within the term "interreligious" to serve as a reminder that, as Anne Hege Grung convincingly shows, religions are not stable entities with fixed boundaries but are dynamic, internally diverse, and ever-fluid movements with shifting and porous boundaries (Grung 2014, 2020). Grung also contends that transreligious thought more properly recognizes intrapersonal multiple religious belonging and representation. That is, transreligious can helpfully place emphasis on the religiosity of the individual over any institutional affiliations. Furthermore, the prefix trans- can often signal the generation of something novel that goes beyond (transcends) the sum total of that which is being integrated or

synthesized. Thus, one possible and perhaps necessary outcome of transreligious theology might be the generation of something new that did not previously exist in the same way. In general, for many of these reasons, the term transreligious functions more accurately and dynamically than the term interreligious – especially in the context of thinking about TWW – hence Oddbjørn Leirvik's observation that "university theology will be done in the third space between established faith traditions – that is, interreligiously.... [and] beyond that, in response to the complex reality of fluid identities and multiple belongings, theology must also increasing be done *trans*religiously" (Leirvik 2020, 33). In any case, perhaps this imperfection of language and frustration over terms is not much of a problem after all. In fact, it may be quite fitting for TWW in its insistence to transcend not only theological walls but linguistic ones as well.

Leaving One's Theological Home (House)

The concluding and constructively provocative lines of Clooney's chapter proposes a revision of Martin's TWW proposal. Whereas Martin argues that "what is needed is a theology without walls," Clooney argues "what is needed is a theology with walls." Whereas Martin pleads for "no confessional boundaries or blinders," Clooney advocates for "a home with foundations and walls and windows and doors, a roof held up by the walls and – why not, a welcome mat at the entrance" (224). Martin affirms the widely recognized self-implication of theology in that "we stand somewhere," but "our sense of our goal is not limited to where we stand at the outset." Might this lively dichotomy between walls and no walls of Martin and Clooney be reconciled? Can one retain their theological home with walls, windows, and, why not, a welcome mat while also embracing the possibility of venturing outside the walls to explore the world? After all, many grow up and leave their childhood house (though perhaps not their "home") to inhabit other houses and even build new ones (some may even inhabit multiple houses and homes). Many also return to their childhood home or frequently visit their family. Might everyone already be socialized into various walls, seen and unseen, whether they know it or not? Even if this is the case, the TWW project can still hold significant merit in its quest to identify and transcend theological walls, regardless of whether such an unwalled theological reality is ever fully possible.

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