
EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The “Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters: Landscapes of Theological Thought” issue of *Poligrafi* delivers articles on contemporary insights into various modes of inter-faith encounters between Christianity and Islam, discussing the theoretical and practical topics around interreligious dynamics, insights into intersubjective encounters and religious peace-building, and also views on mysticism and spirituality – all as discussed within a broader inter-faith paradigm. Also attached to the main journal topics are two specific analyses from the Muslim point of view – on the meaning of the Islamic holiday Eid al-Adha, and an exploration of the religion of Islam by a Malaysian Muslim philosopher, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.

In his paper “Religion and Literature; Identity and Individual: Resetting the Muslim-Christian Encounter,” Carool Kersten interrogates the notions of cultural schizophrenia, double genealogy and west-eastern affinities as developed by philosophers and creative writers, mainly Daryush Shayegan, Abdelwahab Meddeb, and Navid Kermani. As one of the leading contemporary thinkers of the intellectual history of the modern Muslim world, Kersten shows that in the first two decades of the twenty-first century inter-faith encounters have become a casualty of a paradigm shift in the thinking about the global order from the political-ideological bi-polar worldview of the Cold War era to a multipolar world marred by the prospect of culture wars along civilisational fault lines shaped by religiously-informed identity politics. Kersten concludes his essay with a comparative evaluation of Shayegan and Meddeb and their encounters with the European (both French encyclopaedic and German Romantic) strands of thought.

“The Other as My Equal” by Iranian philosopher of religion Rasoul Rasoulipour brings a philosophical framework that allows us to see the causes of human alienation – from each other and from creation. By following the inclusivist notion of God, Rasoulipour first analyses various modes of separation between God and humans in divine scriptures of three Abrahamic religions in order to be able to

understand and possibly overcome the alienation between humans themselves, and also between humans and God. In this endeavour, he reads and interprets thinkers such as Albert Camus, Martin Buber, and Emmanuel Levinas. Finally, he believes that all struggles, oppression and suffering result from this alienation or divide and that an essential mission of all religions needs to be to heal this divide by seeing the other as equal.

“Christian-Muslim Women in Religious Peacebuilding – Breaking Cycles of Violence,” is a contribution from Slovenian ecofeminist theologian Nadja Furlan Štante. The main focus of her paper is the question of women’s religious peacebuilding, which is understood in terms of women’s active participation in building more liberating theologies and societies. The paper builds upon Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite’s assertion that the “violence against women is the largest and longest global war.” Furlan Štante is convinced that peacemaking within theology is actually always already marked by an inter-faith and inter-religious character and work, but also that peacemaking should be understood and placed as one of the starting points towards achieving the much needed transformation of the so called “violent” theologies into the more peaceful and liberating ones, especially for the still too marginalised role of women in them.

The aim of “Islamic Mysticism and Interreligious Dialogue” as written by Iranian religious thinker and philosopher of religion Mohammad Saeedimehr, is to investigate Islamic mysticism and to find out how and to what extent mystical views can build good grounds for a productive and fruitful interreligious dialogue. Saeedimehr first provides a clarification of the meaning of interreligious dialogue as well as of the notion of Islamic mysticism as he understands and follows them. He then explores three mystical principles as three bases for the promotion of interreligious dialogue: “the unity of existence” (*wahdat al-wujud*), “the anthropological thesis of *fitra* (primordial nature),” and “the hermeneutic method for interpreting the Quran.” Finally, Saeedimehr brings together the implications of all these three principles for interreligious dialogue.

“An Exploration of the Christian-Muslim Landscape in Modern Syria and the Contribution of Eastern Christian Thought to Inter-

religious Dynamics,” is a contribution by an Anglican priest and researcher into Christian-Muslim relations in modern Syria, Andrew Ashdown. His paper delves into Christian-Muslim relations in modern Syria and broadly interrogates the importance of eastern Christian thought for the interreligious context within the Middle East. Based on fieldwork undertaken in government-held areas during the Syrian conflict, and combined with critical historical and Christian theological reflection, the article contributes to understanding Syria’s diverse religious landscape and the multi-layered expressions of Christian-Muslim relations in a way that has not been previously attempted. The article is a contribution to knowledge and understanding of the changing Christian-Muslim dynamic in Syria, along with neighbouring regions and their religious landscapes.

“Expounding the Concept of Religion in Islam as Understood by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas” is a paper by Mesut Idriz. As a professor of Comparative History of Civilizations and Islamic Civilization, Idriz discusses Malaysian Muslim philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who, beginning in the 1970s, explicated his thoughts for the English speaking milieu (as he did later in other languages). Idriz’s article is a discussion of the meaning of the concept of religion (dīn) as understood and espoused by al-Attas in his work *Islam: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality*. This contribution shows that a further comparative study between al-Attas’s approach to the religion of Islam and the western and eastern approaches to the concept of religion as exposed in various literatures and beliefs would be a welcome and encouraging effort toward the advancement of mutual understanding between Christian and Muslim religious scholars.

Finally, with “Constructing and Expressing the Muslim Identity: Consuming Eid al-Adha” we complete our special issue. Amar Ahmed (a PhD candidate in sociology of culture) analyses one of the lacunae in ethnographic research with regard to Muslims’ identity construction and expression from an internal perspective. As an Islamic holiday, Eid al-Adha is interpreted through the meanings and values that consumers of Eid al-Adha construct as parts of their identity. In this endeavour Ahmed also discusses related notions such as collectivism,

submission to God, sacrifice, charity, patience, and sacredness. The paper thus endeavours to contribute towards an enhanced understanding of what Muslims do and say during their consumption of Eid al-Adha with the anthropological and social meanings associated with this holiday and its rich symbolism.

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