

Henning Wrogemann, *A Theology of Interreligious Relations, Intercultural Theology: Volume Three, English edition* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2019). 528 pp. \$45.00 Hardcover, \$44.99 Ebook.

Henning Wrogemann, the Chair for Mission Studies, Comparative Religion, and Ecumenics at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel, Germany, in *A Theology of Interreligious Relations* proposes to move away from a cognitive interpretation of the theology of religion and focus on “the phenomena at issue in real interreligious relations” (347). Wrogemann problematizes the existing interreligious models as “purely rational interpretive approaches” (21) that fail to consider the implications of diverse lived realities. Therefore, Wrogemann begins the book with an “obituary” (14) of the traditional threefold typology—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (chapters one and two) and lays out an interdisciplinary discourse spanning thirty-five chapters divided into six parts, where knowledge is assembled from identity theories, social science theories, and theological inquiries to propose a theology of interreligious relations.

In Part one (chapters three to nine), Wrogemann critically evaluates the existing theology-of-religion models based on how those approaches measure up in relation to Christian tradition. Wrogemann classifies the current models as revisionist (John Hick and Paul Knitter), interpretive (Michael von Bruck and Mark Heim), selective (Francis Clooney), and interactionist (Amos Yong). Such an evaluation aims to point out the inadequacies of those approaches in meeting the relational dynamics among people while holding fast to the Christian tradition.

In Part two (chapters ten to fifteen), while omitting Hinduism from the discussion, Wrogemann maps how Islam and Buddhism engage with other religions. Wrogemann evaluates the Islamic and Buddhist views based on their transreligious basis, categorical neutrality, soteriological scope, nature of ultimate reality, motifs of interreligious appreciation, and freedom for reforms. After providing a brief account of Islamic reformism (chapter ten), Wrogemann critically engages with Islamic scholars Farid Esack and Muhammad Shahrur to understand the Islamic theology of other religions. In engaging with the Buddhist view of other religions, Wrogemann identifies particular Buddhist teachings (Four

noble truths, the parable of the raft, emptiness, skillful means, and three-bodies doctrine) and discusses their implications for inter-religious engagements (chapter thirteen). Subsequently, Wrogemann also engages with prominent Buddhist thinkers (Anagarika Dharmapala, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Masao Abe, Thich Nhat Hanh, and John Makransky) to demonstrate the varying Buddhist approaches towards other religions.

In Part three (chapters sixteen to twenty-two), Wrogemann puts forth the building blocks for the theory and theology of interreligious relations after highlighting six fallacies that undergird the traditional Christian theology of religion models. These include: a) the *rationalist* fallacy, where the models perform with the “presupposition that people are guided primarily by their thought processes” (213); b) the *individualist* fallacy, as the models assume that it is the individuals who make decisions; c), the *monolinear fallacy*, where approaches make sweeping calls to recognize the other religion failing to consider the “spectrum of different positions between the poles of recognition and rejection” (215); d) the *elitist* fallacy where such theologies not only assume a specific categorization of theological understanding of particular religions but also expect a “high level of interpretive competency” (215); e) the fallacy of *forgetting the body* (i.e., human corporeality) where emotionally determined speech acts, spaces, and non-verbal physical actions are ignored in the existing interreligious theologies; d) the *religionist* fallacy, namely, overemphasizing religious doctrines while ignoring the historical, relational, societal, regional, and political aspects of religions at the grassroots level.

Subsequently, Wrogemann puts forth the building blocks for the theory of interreligious relations as a corrective to these fallacies by engaging with: a) the complexities of social *identity*-making responding to the question of what identity means; b) social dynamics of *inclusions and exclusions*; c) intricacies of *recognizing* one another in society; d) role of *public space* in making interreligious relations; and e) the importance of *pluralism*. For Wrogemann, in addition to *multiperspectivity*, which is imperative in approaching these building blocks, factors such as *media*, which considers the human body as a “key medium of perception” (298); *performance*, considering the “way or form of (re)presentation” which leads to religious performative ritualistic action (299); *spaces*, social and imaginary spaces that influence the creation of interreligious

relations; *boundaries*, which are “complex strategies of initiating, adjusting and perpetuating boundary-defining actions” (301); and *actors*, the collective-we who plays a role in shaping the religious configurations, are essential in developing an interreligious relations theory.

In Part four (chapters twenty-three to twenty-six), Wrogemann reconsiders the commonly recommended practice of dialogue as an interreligious engagement. Wrogemann begins the discourse by explaining the “various theories of dialogue” (305) such as contact dialogue (interact on regular intervals to remain courteous), information dialogue (where verbal exchanges occur to gather religious information), consensus dialogue (in pursuit of transreligious truth), and persuasion dialogue (to persuade the other to one’s religious truth). However, Wrogemann further directs the discussion towards the complex nature of the dialogue beyond verbal exchanges on doctrinal matters. The matters of societal power (caste system, Islamic laws, Christian demonological discourses), religious vs. secular societal moral conceptions, use of silence, and non-verbal gestures in dialogues are discussed to demonstrate the need for a “semiotic dimension to the dialogical” (322).

In Part five (chapters twenty-seven to thirty-two), unlike the theology-of-religion models that attempt to block “out the issue of interreligious rivalry” (347), Wrogemann proposes a theology of interreligious relations that acknowledge “the fact that competition can play an ongoing and . . . productive role in interreligious relation” (348). For Wrogemann, any religious adherent who believes that his/her religion contains the life-promoting teachings will try to convince others of such conviction. Therefore, the right question is “not whether such powers and rivalries should be permitted . . . [but] how to deal with them” (352). Additionally, Wrogemann calls for an honest engagement with the harsh religious texts that are “used pejoratively,” referring to the religious other (353).

Therefore, in constructing a Christian theology of interreligious relations, Wrogemann interacts with some harsh biblical texts while employing a trinitarian framework for his discussion. Wrogemann engages with Old Testament texts that testify the jealous, angry, and vengeful Father God to “identify the life-promoting potentialities”

embedded within them that call for love, justice, and hope (367). In engaging with Jesus Christ, Wrogemann identifies the relationality of Jesus Christ, highlighting his emotionality and body language to provide a rationale for an interreligious communicative action. In discussing Holy Spirit's role, Wrogemann engages with 1 Peter to expound on recognition, where an "inclusionary-attractive lifestyle" is demanded of Christians as a basis for an ethics of interreligious recognition (395).

In Part six (chapters thirty-three to thirty-five), although unrelated to the book's central thesis, Wrogemann summarizes his *Intercultural Theology* trilogy where this book is the final volume. Therefore, Wrogemann understands the emergence of intercultural theology as a discipline in conversation with mission studies and religious studies attempting to provide a voice for various Christianities from the non-western world, both lived and doctrinal in its respective cultural, societal and neighboring religious configurations.

Collectively, *A Theology of Interreligious Relations* calls us to consider the importance of relations amid religious diversity. Within the broader Christian scholarship of inter-religious discourse, at first, Wrogemann's proposal may sound like a repackaging, as from the mid-twentieth century onwards, the mainline Protestants and Catholics have strived to convince the Christian world, namely the evangelicals, of the importance of relationship in religious diversity. However, unlike such previous attempts, Wrogemann's proposal is a breath of fresh air as he takes an interdisciplinary approach, gathering insights from social scientists and other theorists, along with theological reflection.

However, from a critical perspective, Wrogemann's proposal seems to sidestep two important aspects. First, although Wrogemann incorporates various interviews and life stories from the Global south to make the arguments, there is an evident lack of engagement with non-western scholars. Given that the scholars from the Global south have been living in an interreligious relational context for centuries and, at least since the 1938 Tambaram Conference, have been very active in debates and writings about interreligiosity, interacting with a few non-western Christian scholars (Stanley Samartha, Raimundo Panikkar, Vinod Ramachandra, Wesley Ariarajah and Ajith Fernando to name a few) would have added significant value to Wrogemann's overall thesis.

Second, although Wrogemann rightfully calls to consider relations as a theological imperative for interreligious engagement, other than dialogue, Wrogemann did not propose any constructive relational practices for interreligious engagement. As contemporary scholarship suggests practices such as friendship and hospitality as necessary, in addition to dialogue, Wrogemann's lack of engagement with such practices fails to elucidate how he envisions his theology of interreligious relations being practiced.

Nonetheless, these gaps should not deter anyone from engaging with the book. Along with the creative interdisciplinary approach towards religious diversity, the book's strength mainly lies in its critique of the existing theology-of-religion paradigm. Wrogemann's call for relations should be heeded as a gentle reminder to value the grassroots realities in our pursuit of theologizing, which too often solely relies on theoretical, philosophical propositions.

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