

## Editor's Introduction

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## 1 Navigating the New Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in Theological Education

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### Editor's Introduction

This book is about teaching, interfaith dialogue and theological education. The core of the book: six critical case studies of seminary taught, degree courses in interfaith dialogue. The cases give expression to a broad range of dialogical pedagogies and course formats, and they include the courses' syllabi and bibliographies. Each case course includes an experience of dialogue as part of the course. This is definitive of the project, for reasons elaborated below.

By critical case we mean one that describes not only the context, content, methods and related goals and rationale of the course, but also presents an evaluation of the course and discussion of the implications of the evaluation for teaching interfaith dialogue in theological institutions. Our hope for the book: To create a practical literature and related conversation among theological educators on the role of interfaith dialogue in a seminary curriculum, and on the substantive and structural issues related to it.

The cases are first hand accounts, written by the teachers themselves -- all veteran theological educators. With the support of a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to Hartford Seminary, the group gathered several times between February 2007 and September 2008. The initial times together were spent getting to know each other, discussing our

experiences, our approaches to and philosophies about interfaith dialogue and the pedagogical resources that we use in teaching it, and developing a common sense of the kind of critical case the project desired. Beginning in September 2007, each person presented a first draft of their case based on a course they taught during the time of the project. Case presentations extended over several sessions of discussion, critique and deepening reflection on the nature and location of dialogue in theological education. Christy Lohr, whose integrative essay joins the cases in this volume, joined the case writer group during the case review period of the project.

With revised, final drafts in hand, the case writer group convened two meetings to discuss the cases with seminary faculty more broadly. The meetings took place in Berkeley and Chicago. Invitations were extended to all seminary faculty in the respective areas to engage two or three of the project cases, share the work they themselves were doing and engage each other in substantive conversation. The meetings intended and accomplished several purposes. Foremost was to begin to disseminate the results of the project in a way that both advocated a central role for interfaith dialogue within the theological curriculum and laid a foundation for ongoing critical engagement among seminary faculty of the theory, theology and the practice; and to do so in a dialogical way.

Our thanks to the sixty or so faculty who shared in our journey at the regional meetings. Thanks also to the Hartford Seminary faculty who indulged our interim reflections at several of their regular Wednesday Collegial Sharing luncheons along the way; and to Sheryl Wiggins and David Barrett for their general assistance. Most importantly, our deepest felt thanks to the case writers for their willingness to dialogue with us and with each other about a personal passion, and for their willingness to ultimately present their passion in published form to their peers; to the Wabash Center for their continuing support through the several interesting twists in the project's unfolding; to Alexa Lindauer who copy-edited the entire manuscript; and to the many, many students in the case courses. Dialogue is about mutuality. Thank you students for your gift to us.

### Why this Book at this Time

September 11, 2001 got America's attention. Tragic – in so many ways. Earth shattering – in so many ways. World changing – in so

many ways. Among the latter, as one of us shared at the annual meeting of the Religion News Writers Association less than two weeks later, the shift from an *Ecumenical to Interfaith Consciousness about America's Religious Diversity*.

Critical to the point is that this shift is about awareness and acknowledgement, not a sudden change in presence or numbers. Muslims have been in North America since the beginning of our history with slavery, and adherents of Islam and a variety of Asian religions have been increasing steadily since changes to immigration laws nearly 50 years ago. The relative lack of acknowledgement of the multi-faith reality in the United States prior to September 11 is suggested, for example, by the fact that a major survey of congregations in the U.S. conducted in 2000 found that while 45% of congregations were involvement in ecumenical Christian worship in the year prior to the survey, only 7% indicated involvement in interfaith worship (and much of this was Christian/Jewish).

The multi-faith character of American society would be, of course, no surprise to theological educators. Indeed, in an essay on "Globalization, World Religions and Theological Education" in the "Looking Toward the Future" section of the 1999 volume of *Theological Education* celebrating the conclusion of Association of Theological Education's decade of globalization (Vol 35, No 2, pp 143-153), M. Thangaraj explicitly recognizes that, "Dialogue across religious boundaries has become a daily activity in many people's lives." His conclusion and plea: an increased engagement with world religions is critical for Christian theological education for three reasons. A Christian minister cannot have an adequate theological grounding for his or her faith without a meaningful understanding of how it relates to other faith traditions. A minister cannot adequately address the everyday interfaith experience and practice of his or her laity. Public ministry in today's world is increasingly interfaith.

World and national events since September 2001 have only intensified awareness of Muslims and Islam in particular and multi-faith diversity more broadly in the United States. Public opinion polls suggest both encouraging and discouraging developments. American attitudes toward American Muslims are a bit more positive today than nine years ago and American congregations' involvement in interfaith worship has more than doubled since the 2000. In contrast, American attitudes toward Islam as a religion are less positive today and the

dominant approaches of congregations to interfaith issues appear to remain indifference and avoidance.

Against this background of increasing awareness, increased necessity (assuming tolerance across diversity is a good thing), and increased lay and congregational involvement in interfaith engagement, one might think that a subject like Interfaith Dialogue (as a vehicle for tolerance through enhanced understanding and connection) would be a hot-bed of interest in theological education, or at least a begrudging capitulation to reality. The evidence is, unfortunately, less compelling. For example, one will not find a single article in *Theological Education* about interfaith dialogue between September 2001 and January 2007, when the case authors in this volume first met; indeed, not since the conclusion of the ATS decade of globalization in 1999; and in fact, not since the journal's inception in 1964! Nor have there been any to date (through Vol 44, No 2, 2009). This is all the more ironic given the centrality of "diversity" to ATS priorities and, relatedly, to issues of *Theological Education*. Tellingly, the one article in *Theological Education* that contains "Dialogue" in its title is about black and latino theologies (Vol 38, No 2, 2002, p 87-109).

A survey of seminary deans and an online search of seminary catalogues done in fall, 2006 to help identify possible seminary courses for this book was only a little more dialogically-friendly than *Theological Education*. The good news is that we were able to find several courses that fit our criteria. The bad news was that there were only a few more than the five seminaries represented in the book that offered degree courses taught by regular faculty that included an experience of interfaith dialogue.

This certainly fit our impressions. As we looked out across theological education in the United States we found that although there seemed to be a lot of talk about and enthusiasm for interfaith dialogue, there was a paucity of courses related to interfaith dialogue in even the broadest sense, and very few places in which interfaith dialogue was actually happening. There was, from our vantage point, a curricular and pedagogical vacuum that badly needed to be filled.

More encouraging, at first glance, was our discovery of an entire section of syllabi listed under Interreligious Dialogue on the Wabash Center Guide to Internet Resources For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. Unfortunately, a quick perusal in June 2007 indicated that an actual conversation or encounter with a person of

another faith tradition was not a goal of a single course listed; and that learning about the practice of putting persons from different faith traditions into conversation or dialogue with each other was a goal of, at most, one of the courses. Among other things this means that from among the half dozen or so different types of interreligious dialogue typical of the emerging literature on the subject, the cutting edge of university and seminary courses on dialogue listed on the Wabash site all narrowly focused on a single, and typically the most rudimentary, purpose. In terms of the following list of types of dialogue, for example, the Wabash site syllabi all fall into "Informational," although several move beyond basic comparative religions to also include the history of relations between two or more faith tradition.

- 1) Informational: Acquiring of knowledge of the faith partner's religious history, founding, basic beliefs, scriptures, etc.
- 2) Confessional: Allowing the faith partners to speak for and define themselves in terms of what it means to live as an adherent.
- 3) Experiential: Dialogue with faith partners from within the partner's tradition, worship and ritual - entering into the feelings of one's partner and permitting that person's symbols and stories to guide.
- 4) Relational: Develop friendships with individual persons beyond the "business" of dialogue.
- 5) Practical: Collaborate to promote peace and justice. [[http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Interfaith\\_dialogue/guidelines\\_interfaith.php#goals](http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Interfaith_dialogue/guidelines_interfaith.php#goals)]

Such narrow and elementary approaches, we believe, cannot adequately address the three reasons set forth by Thangaraj almost a decade ago for why the increased engagement of interfaith issues is critical for theological education. Rather, we believe, theological education can only meet these challenges for its ministry students and related congregations and denominations by exposing students to the full range of dialogical purposes. Hence, our desire for the book to create a practical literature and related conversation among theological educators on the role of the practice of interfaith dialogue in a seminary curriculum is driven by the related desire to be a constructive advocate for courses in Interfaith Dialogue using pedagogies that optimize the full range of dialogical purposes and practices. To use ATS outcome

language: we want to enhance the capacity of seminaries to equip their students to engage the multi-faith reality of the American (and global) context in ways that advance mutual understanding and appreciative relationships across faith traditions.

## The Cases

The desire to maximize the diversity of dialogical pedagogies, course formats, Christian traditions represented within the Association of Theological Schools, and regions of the country in a limited number of case courses at first struck us as rather daunting. One of the few positives of discovering that we really had a very limited number of courses from which to draw was that it made the selection process considerably easier. Eventually we gathered an experienced group of theological educators from three regions of the country that included professors from Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and ecumenical schools, as well as from three religious traditions – Christian, Jewish and Muslim.

The six case studies, along with a very brief summary of each, are listed below in the order they appear in the book. The cases are preceded in the book by an integrative essay that further comments on each case's distinctiveness and connects the cases to a broader examination of the issues and potential location of interfaith dialogue in North American theological education: ***Navigating the New Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in Theological Education***, Christy Lohr, Intersections Institute, Eastern Cluster of Lutheran Seminaries.

- 1) ***'Interreligious Dialogue' at the Jesuit School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley***, James Redington, St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia

The *'Interreligious Dialogue'* course at the Jesuit School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, combines a substantive course on the history of and current approaches to dialogue with in-class exercises in meditation and a required experience of dialogue. It includes sections on Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism, emphasizing the latter two in the dialogue requirement. It appears first because it includes a succinct overview of the history of and current approaches to dialogue; it alerts the reader to the importance of

spiritual practices for the experiential/relational practice of dialogue (a common thread across the courses), and uses, arguably, the simplest approach for students to be in dialogue – go find your own experience and then run it by the professor.

**2) *World Religions and Christianity: A Global Perspective in the Context of the Overall Program of Theological Education at Perkins School of Theology*, Robert Hunt.**

The *World Religions and Christianity* case presents what we believe is the most typical current approach among seminaries for dealing with the challenge of interfaith dialogue – specifically grafting dialogue onto an existing course in world religions. Interfaith Dialogue's tension with evangelical Christianity is a visible dynamic in the case. For the course's required experience of dialogue, students are assigned to external Hindu, Jewish and Muslim organizations pre-arranged by the Professor. In addition to the course dynamic the case includes an insightful overview of the interfaith practice of a wide spectrum of religious organization in the Dallas area.

**3) *Building Abrahamic Partnerships: A Model Interfaith Program at Hartford Seminary*, Yehezkel Landau**

The *Building Abrahamic Partnerships* case documents a very different kind of course than either of the first two. It is an eight-day intensive for which an equal number of degree and non-degree Christians, Jews and Muslims from around the US are recruited, with priority to Hartford Seminary students. The eight days are a continual experience of dialogue aimed at developing basic concepts and skills for leadership in building Abrahamic partnerships. The course and case are especially strong in the breadth of dialogical methods used and on the relational skills required of the course leadership.

**4) *The Challenge of World Religions to Christian Faith and Practice at Drew University School of Theology*, S. Wesley Ariarajah**

The *Challenge of World Religions* case is more broadly about Drew's three course curriculum addressing interfaith issues. The three courses include a heavily experiential world religions course with personal engagements with Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism; a relatively straight forward theology of religions course; and an international, cross-cultural immersion focused on interfaith encounter. Although the world religions course is highlighted in the case, the author's reflection on the systemic inter-relationships among and distinctive contributions of each of the three courses is a unique contribution of the case. Another unique contribution is the treatment given to the international immersion course and how this popular course format can be adapted to addressing interfaith issues. Still another distinctive of the case is the extensive attention given to student reflections of their experiences.

**5) *Theological Education for Interfaith Engagement: The Philadelphia Story*, J. Paul Rajashekar, The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.**

The *Philadelphia Story* (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia), like the Drew case, strongly situates interfaith concerns within the overall curriculum. A distinctive feature of the case is the strong argument the author, who was dean during a recent curriculum revision and who is a systematic theologian, makes for the necessity of Christian theology to move from a "self-referential" to a "cross-referential" posture in its method, hermeneutic and articulation. The case then moves to its focal course concern with the required, Theory and Practice of Interfaith Dialogue. A distinctive strength of the case's treatment of the course is its critical struggle with the pros and cons of having students "find and direct their own" dialogue experience.

**6) *Dialogue in a World of Difference: Turning Necessity into Opportunity in Hartford Seminary's Master of Arts Program*, Suendam Birinci, Heidi Hadsell, and David Roozen.**

The *Dialogue in a World of Difference* case is the only one about a course that is not a part of an MDiv curriculum. Rather, the course is an attempt to use a semester long experience of interfaith dialogue taken during a student's first semester to socialize students into the relational and appreciative skills, capacities and preferences that will

help them maximize learning in the seminary's religiously and culturally diverse MA student body. Three distinctive features of the course/case are the near equal mix of international and US students in the class, the near equal mix of Christian and non-Christian students in the course; and the near equal mix of religious professionals and laity. The case also reports on a less than successful experiment with online dialogue.

### About the Editors

Heidi Hadsell is President of Hartford Seminary and Professor of Social Ethics. She is former Director, The Ecumenical Institute of The World Council of Churches Bossey, Switzerland and former Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at McCormick Theological Seminary. She has served as a consultant to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches – Roman Catholic Dialogue; consultant for institutional change towards the globalization of theological education, Pilot Immersion Project for the Globalization of Theological Education, and consultant for curriculum design and organizational structure, Pilot Master's degree program for Public Administrators, Institute for Technical and Economic Planning, Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil.

David Roozen is Director of the Hartford Seminary Institute for Religion Research and Professor of Religion and Society. More widely recognized for his work in congregational studies and religious trends, Roozen also has an extensive record of research and publication on theological education, including, for example: *Changing The Way Seminaries Teach*. David A. Roozen, Alice Frazer Evans and Robert A. Evans (Plowshares Institute, 1996); *Interfaith FACT's: An Invitation to Dialogue*. Martin Bailey and David A. Roozen (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2003); "Patterns of Globalization: Six Case Studies," guest editor, *Theological Education* (Spring, 1991); and, *The Globalization of Theological Education*. Alice Frazer Evans, Robert A. Evans and David A. Roozen (eds) (Orbis Books, 1993).

## 1 Navigating the New Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in Theological Education

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The case studies presented here provide some of the best examples of the types and range of courses offered on interfaith dialogue in American theological education. This is an important topic for seminaries to be engaging. Not only have the demographics and culture changed in the United States so that those who were once considered to be foreign "others" are now understood to be neighbors, but also globalization and a worldwide loosening of borders mean that religious and cultural differences are a matter of course for most Americans. Theological education has traditionally been about preparing and raising up well-trained leadership in the church, but it is also about more than that. It is also about preparing and raising up leadership for the community, and in order to be able to relate to a wider spectrum of community members, religious leaders must be able to navigate interfaith relationships. To be truly relevant to the religiously diverse contexts in which today's clergy and lay people are called to serve means having an understanding of the complexities that emerge as a result of religious plurality.

All of the schools highlighted in this book recognize the importance of training leaders to relate appropriately to non-Christians and to help others relate to non-Christians. Not to do so in the twenty-first century would be irresponsible. Each of the courses presented here also uses dialogue as a key means of engaging the "religious other". That is intentional. Dialogue is where praxis and pedagogy meet. Dialogue is the active outgrowth of classroom learning. Dialogue does not take place in a vacuum, but requires the student to move beyond his or her comfort zone of library and lecture hall to engage members of

other communities. It asks students to suspend preconceptions and remain open to new expressions of serving God and practicing faith.

In its 2008 to 2014 work plan, the Association of Theological Schools counts interfaith education among its three targeted projects. This focus grows from a recognition that the religious landscape of North America has changed and leaders need to be well-equipped to serve in settings that enjoy religious diversity. The work plan states, "Ministers and priests will need to be better informed about the commitments and practices of these religious communities; they will need to expand their own theology with a theology of world religions; and they will need to be able to minister in the contexts of interreligious interaction and engagement in the settings where they will serve." The collection of cases presented here represents this new trend toward interreligious sensitivity that is now an emerging priority in some theological schools. More specifically, what is found here are the successes and challenges that a number of schools from different denominations have had in training leaders to be fluent in the language of interfaith dialogue.

### What Does this Work Represent?

Theological schools have been challenged to adapt their curricula in order to meet new needs in a changing society. Dan Aleshire, Executive Director of the ATS, writes of the future work of theological schools in light of current economic and ideological challenges. He comments, "As centers of faithful inquiry, schools support the efforts of faith communities to locate the underpinnings of their beliefs in the intellectual idiom and social realities of their time and culture. ... They are good to the extent that they cultivate the learning, knowledge, skills, sensitivities, and perceptions that the church needs for its leaders."<sup>1</sup> The "intellectual idiom" of the current time and culture requires conceptualizing the church, its mission and its community outside of previously-conceived boxes. This means building ministries that speak to the multi-faceted aspects of faith, naming areas in which God's people have been neglected or forgotten, and atoning for sins that have created division rather than reconciliation. In response to this, new

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Aleshire, Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008) 163, 165.

programs have sprung up that focus on discrete areas of ministry located in areas such as multicultural, generational or urban settings. These concentrated programs are meant to prepare religious leadership for service in the diverse contexts that the churches serve. The list of such specialized ministries is ever-growing, and interfaith awareness is the latest movement in the attempt to speak to the intellectual idiom and social realities of the present age.

This book represents a commitment to prepare leaders for work in a world filled with diversity. It speaks to the need articulated by Aleshire to cultivate specific "skills and sensitivities" among church leaders today. No longer are seminary graduates being called to serve homogenous communities with little difference among forms of religious expression. Instead, most regions of North America in the twenty-first century represent the realities of globalization in concrete ways. Non-Christians are no longer encountered solely by missionaries who take on the challenge of foreign service; rather, engaging the other is around the block, next door, behind the counter at your favorite restaurant or across the hall at work. Recognizing this changing dynamic is what prompted the theological schools featured in this collection of case studies to add courses on interreligious dialogue to their curricula.

This book represents a practical resource for theological educators looking to incorporate interfaith dialogue into their own institutional offerings. The emphasis on dialogue is important and intentional. The courses presented here are not mere survey courses or introductions to world religions. Providing such basic information on neighbors of other faiths is indeed important, but that is not the focus of this research. These cases, instead, represent attempts to cultivate a dialogical sensitivity in theological students. Such sensitivity is important for clergy and religious educators not only as a means of engaging their own constituents, but also as a means of relating to the wider and varied communities in which they will serve. Research indicates that American congregations are more involved in interfaith endeavors today than they were a decade ago. Therefore, it is time for theological schools to acknowledge this and prepare religious leaders to cross faith boundaries and learn appropriate ways of connecting their people with people of other faiths.

The schools invited to prepare cases for this project were selected because they do just that: they recognize the importance of forming leaders who can interact appreciatively with their interreligious

neighbors. This requires a solid grounding both in one's own tradition as well as perceptions of faith which speak to questions of Christian identity. The schools presented here have made interreligious encounter a priority. They have designated it as an essential part of the larger curriculum, and thus they make bold statements about the necessity of interfaith formation as an essential part of theological formation. This type of formation requires students to reflect on Christian identity as well as pastoral leadership. It asks for serious evaluation of the place of doctrine and truth claims in and on one's theology. It challenges students to move outside of their comfort zones not only to encounter difference, but also to truly engage it in meaningful ways. By pushing seminarians to do this, these schools are creating leaders who will be able to walk with communities that are attempting to do the same and challenge their communities that are not yet thinking in this direction to do so.

### Similarities and Differences within the Case Studies

This book presents six case studies of courses currently being taught in U.S. theological schools. Each course has its own unique character and flavor, but they all also share certain elements. As stated previously, each case study deals specifically with courses on interreligious dialogue that include a practicum experience of dialogue. They also all fulfill interreligious criteria in their schools' curricula. Regardless of whether the course itself is required or whether it is one of several course options that fulfill an obligatory core, this aspect is important because it points to the commitment to interfaith education that these schools have made. By requiring an interfaith or ecumenical course in the core curriculum, these schools are emphasizing the need for leaders to be comfortable with faith traditions other than their own. In this way, these courses represent an attempt to assist students as they work out their own faith identities in light of religious diversity. Thus, these courses are helping to form religious leaders who can think deeply about both the intellectual and practical encounters with difference and eventually come to reconcile the tensions that this difference can create.

As dialogue is the primary focus of the cases studies, it is worth taking a moment to comment on the various types and aims of interreligious dialogue. This will help to identify whether the courses featured here are attempting to accomplish the same tasks. In its 1991

document on interreligious dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, the Catholic Church identified four forms of dialogue. These shape Catholic levels of engagement but are also labels that have commonly been taken up by others engaged in interfaith endeavors: 1) dialogue of life has an emphasis on neighborliness and openness to those of other faiths; 2) dialogue of action brings people together in joint liberative projects; 3) dialogue of theological exchange sees scholars engaging one another over issues of spiritual value; and 4) dialogue of religious experience invites people of faith to share the practices of their traditions.<sup>2</sup> Each of these has different priorities and allows for a different type of engagement. While the courses outlined here might involve all of these aspects of dialogue, to a certain extent they tend to focus more on the third and fourth types. (It should be noted, however, that the "dialogue of theological engagement" in Catholic parlance assumes specialists in each tradition engaging each other over theological topics, and one of the challenges articulated in some of the case studies presented here is the inequities in theological understanding between lay and clergy dialogue partners.)

Scarboro Missions, a Canadian Catholic mission society, expands the Vatican's four stages of dialogue to introduce five additional components. Dialogue should be *informational* in that it allows one to gain knowledge of another's tradition; it should be *confessional* as it provides people of faith opportunities to explain what it means to live in their traditions; it should be *experiential* as others are invited to join in worship and ritual practices; it should be *relational* as friendships are built through dialogue; and it should be *practical* as it promotes peace and justice.<sup>3</sup> Movements toward peaceful coexistence and sustained friendships, while worthwhile, represent lofty if not unrealistic objectives for a one semester course. The courses featured in this volume tend to concentrate more solidly on the first three of these dialogue aims.

How a dialogue is structured can impact the success of achieving its objectives. The case studies included in this book use dialogues that

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<sup>2</sup> *Dialogue and Proclamation*, paragraph 42,  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Interfaith\\_dialogue/guidelines\\_interfaith.php#levels](http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Interfaith_dialogue/guidelines_interfaith.php#levels)

have been structured by the professor as well as those left to the student to initiate. One popular model involves an instructor arranging a visit to a place of worship that also includes interaction and dialogue with the local community. These types of dialogues can be quite informative and interesting for students, but they are unlikely to lead to the more relational or practical outcomes outlined above. Several of the cases presented here require sustained dialogue – whether individually or in a group – between students and people of other faiths. This allows for a richer experience than a one-time encounter permits, and it enhances the possibilities that the dialogue will engage a deeper level of commitment for those involved.

Each of the cases presented here required two types of experiential opportunities for students: visits and dialogues. How these are structured and arranged varies among the courses, and the differences in these experiences can have implications for student engagement and learnings.

A group visit to a new worship site creates a much different experience than a visit taken by an individual, and this is a notable dissimilarity among the courses presented here. A group visit requires more planning on the part of the instructor, of course, but it also provides both a shared experience among classmates as well as a potential “buffer” for interaction with community members. It is entirely possible for more reticent students to visit a new place of worship and simply observe what transpires without truly interacting with members of that community. Yet, at the same time, there is a benefit to having a shared experience among an entire class. This can allow for better group reflection on the visit and discussion of what transpired. When a student plans and executes a visit alone, the dynamic is changed and the experience is reflected on differently. The student-initiated visit requires more research, participation and initiative on the part of the individual. It might even provide an introduction to a community not yet encountered by the professor. Yet, the quality of the experience cannot be controlled or guaranteed as well as with a pre-planned group visit. For better or worse, the individual student trip to a new place of worship also has a smaller impact on the community visited.

Similar questions about the quality and nature of interactions arise in the design of dialogue experiences. The cases presented here introduce dialogue endeavors that are both student-initiated and

instructor-designed. These two models are markedly different and both have their benefits and drawbacks.

Having the students arrange their own dialogue experiences is a valuable lesson. It forces them out of the interreligious frying pan and into the fire, so to speak, as it challenges them to take initiative and overcome potential reticence. By doing their own research on what other communities are present around them and making the initial contact with a representative from that community, the students are better preparing for a future in their own ministry settings where they will be responsible for outreach to their neighbors. It is important to note that the skills garnered through the process of setting up and engaging dialogue are transferrable to other aspects of leadership. A side benefit of engaging in interreligious dialogue, for example, is an enhanced capacity for communication with and about difference. Cultivating this skill can strengthen a person's ability to communicate with myriad audiences, not just those in the interfaith arena. It can also enhance a student's community-organizing and networking capabilities.

Professor-arranged dialogues have their benefits, too. Whether these are set up as an in-class component as is the case with the Hartford Seminary examples, or arranged as facilitated exercises with other faith communities as is demonstrated in the Perkins example, intentional dialogue groups can be a useful tool for introducing students to the nuances of dialogue. As the Perkins case highlights, however, intentionally structured dialogues can be cumbersome to prepare. Facilitators must be trained and equipped with the appropriate guidelines so that all group leaders are “on the same page” about the nature and objectives of the dialogue. Students in these types of sessions might enter into such endeavors with greater expectations of what will be shared and accomplished merely because of the fact that they are moderated and arranged by the faculty member.

Student-initiated dialogues, however, are perceived to be much looser and informal. This does not diminish the potential for these to be an educational experience, however. The expectations of student-designed dialogues vary according to the students involved, but several of the case studies included here demonstrate that even when a dialogue might not initially seem to be a “success” in the student's eyes, it can still yield much fruit in terms of teachable moments and opportunities for insight into another's worldview.



The theological formation outlined in each case study takes different shapes, in part, due to the nature of the student bodies and the institutional priorities at play in each location. A brief examination of each case will highlight some of the unique elements they offer. By clarifying some of the particularities of the cases, one can more easily assess and critique the benefits and challenges provided by the various pedagogical methods.

The “Interreligious Dialogue” course at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California introduces students to the history of dialogue and asks them to reflect on different approaches to the exercise. Interestingly, in addition to required dialogue experiences, the course instructor also emphasizes the cultivation of spiritual practice in each class session. This is a unique aspect of this course in comparison to the others. Dr. Redington goes farther than merely introducing meditation as a component of each meeting. (He does, indeed, do this, and as his case study notes, the students have commented favorably on it.) In the tradition of fellow Catholic theologian Raimon Panikkar, however, Reddington also introduces dialogue, itself, as a religious act – a spiritual discipline to be cultivated. Students are invited, then, to reflect on whether dialogue can become a means or vehicle of salvation. This emphasis on spiritual practice – within the class as well as through dialogue – is an important element in the pedagogical approach outlined in the Berkeley case study. This is, perhaps, reflective of the fact that this course was created in a Roman Catholic institution where spiritual disciplines are often stressed more than in some Protestant traditions.

The Berkeley case study is also important because it is the best example of a course that is tradition-constituted. In other words, it draws heavily on Roman Catholic resources and relates issues broached in the course back to larger Catholic themes. (Compare this to the case study from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia that does not have a Lutheran voice included in the required reading.) Redington writes of the need for interreligious dialogue to have a *locus theologicus*, a legitimate base from which to engage the non-Christian, and he draws heavily on Catholic documents and theologians in his presentations of the many facets of dialogue. While this aspect of the course may go unnoticed by non-Catholic students, it is good to give the Catholics a firm understanding of the place and importance of interreligious dialogue within their tradition. Other denominationally-

affiliated schools would do well to offer their students a similar tradition-constituted rationale for dialogue.

To his credit, Redington also engages Church texts and positions that have been difficult for dialogue-minded Catholics to accept. For example, students are expected to read *Dominus Iesus*, the declaration of the Vatican’s Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. This is a statement which many interfaith activists have found troubling due to the negative stance on other traditions that it presents. While it would be easy to dismiss texts that are uncomfortable for those who are committed to building quality interreligious relationships, Redington introduces *Dominus Iesus* because it offers an important aspect of the debate around dialogue. To ignore it would mean not presenting the full story and not introducing students to the full scope of the Catholic responses to dialogue.

The “Philadelphia Story” is noteworthy for its commitment to locating the dialogical experience at the beginning of the student’s seminary career. During the first two weeks on campus, students are brought into contact with people of other faiths. They visit houses of worship and meet a variety of religious leaders. The school thus sends a clear message that being able to navigate interreligious relationships is an integral part of theological formation. Additionally, the emphasis on dialogue as a methodology to be employed through the entire educational process is admirable. Dialogue, then, becomes a skill that students can apply across disciplines. In this way, dialogue becomes a habit that orients a student’s whole ministry; it becomes integrated and holistic.

The introduction of interfaith issues and the need for dialogue at the beginning of the student’s seminary training also speaks to a focus on public theology that is uniquely present at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Public theology recognizes at its core the open exchange of beliefs across many aspects of human life – not just in the pew on Sunday mornings. In true Lutheran form, public theology challenges individuals to participate as people of faith in the world around them. It prepares people for leadership at life’s intersections between faith and society. As noted previously, the public world in which students will practice their faith is not only a Christian world; rather it is a religiously complex and diverse world. Thus, the program at LTSP operates with an interfaith sensibility that challenges students early on to articulate their faith in relationship to another’s.

The Philadelphia program also has a clear emphasis on theology alongside praxis. Dialogue becomes part of the way in which one does theology. Paul Rajashekar, the Dean of LTSP, refers to this as a cross-referential approach. This is not surprising language for a Lutheran to use, as so much of that tradition is rooted in what Martin Luther referred to as a *theologia crucis*, the theology of the cross. Yet, Dr. Rajashekar's cross-referential approach to dialogical theology is not just about having the cross of Christ at the heart of one's theology; it is also about working across faith traditions to gain a deeper appreciation of one's own faith. To be cross-referential means that one draws on insights from other traditions to gain greater self-understanding. This requires that students learn to appreciate other's traditions, rituals and stories on their own terms and without the taint of the student's own theological assumptions.

The "Philadelphia story" also addresses significant issues around the posture of dialogue for future clergy. In this case the appropriate ways to approach and engage people of other faiths become a component of pastoral training. Dialogue can be an exercise in professionalism for students whose careers will revolve around engaging others and building community. Dr. Rajashekar importantly notes that in the case of interfaith dialogue, especially with multicultural partners, this can bring out questions of race and hospitality among his students. Students must learn to be gracious guests as well as hosts – a role that is sometimes more difficult. If mastered, however, this is a skill that will serve them well in their future endeavors.

The Drew University course introduces an important component that is absent from the other case studies: immersive, international travel. Admittedly, the travel seminar that is introduced in the case study is not the required course in dialogue, but it does deepen the interreligious experience of those who have taken the preliminary class. The impact of a travel seminar can be greater for a student than a typical campus-based course because it allows for a more integrative and intensive learning experience. Relationships are forged and tested in group travel events in ways that cannot be simulated in the classroom setting. In such seminars the world becomes the classroom, and the students are reminded of the interconnectedness of all people.

Dr. Ariarajah's study tours do not integrate an interreligious component into the group's composition, and one has to wonder how these experiences would be different with a group of interfaith travel

companions. While it is clearly meaningful and significant for students to visit ashrams in India, this type of exercise runs the risk of becoming nothing more than spiritual tourism if it is not properly managed and facilitated. Dr. Ariarajah is certainly an adept dialogue facilitator, but to have an interreligious group of participants sharing the entirety of the experiences might add new depth and richness to the enterprise.

The two case studies from Hartford Seminary at first glance are noticeably different from the other four cases because of the diversity within the student body of that institution. Having a mix of Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the "Building Abrahamic Partnerships" course makes the class sessions, themselves, dialogical experiences. The dynamic of the dialogue also shifts a bit as participants are "equal partners" at the table: each participant is a student. While each student may be taking the course for different reasons – some are degree seekers, others are life learners – the equal status as students remains. Contrast this to the intentionally orchestrated dialogue sessions in which members of a community sit and talk with members of a class. Whereas the intention of the dialogue experience is intended to be the same, participants in these latter endeavors do come to the experience with different agendas and expectations. Members of the community are "hosts" whereas students are "guests". Regardless of how intentional the facilitator is in her attempts to establish an atmosphere of openness and equality, this type of situation is different than one in which dialogue participants are cohorts. These case studies even admit as much when they speak of dialogues with community groups turning into information sharing sessions or opportunities for evangelism. The religiously diversified student body at Hartford Seminary simply lends itself to a different – and some might say deeper – sort of dialogue experience. This is epitomized in the BAP course where the class composition is intentionally "stacked" to have equal representation among Christians, Muslim and Jews. Admittedly, this demands more work in recruitment on the part of the professor, but it yields invaluable results for the students and the nature of their dialogue.

A similar diversity of religious perspective is set up in the Hartford Seminary teaching faculty, as is demonstrated in both the "Dialogue in a World of Difference" and BAP case studies. Here an interfaith team of instructors teaches the courses. This is different from those other examples where a representative of a particular faith community will meet with the class for one session. The team approach is helpful because it models interfaith cooperation in the teaching faculty, but

also because it allows feedback, instruction and guidance from an interreligious perspective. Having an interfaith teaching team also allows students and faculty to build an on-going relationship. This facilitates deeper engagement than a single presentation or encounter would allow. It also allows for sustained theological reflection on given issues and themes.

The Perkins School of Theology case represents, perhaps, one of the most labor intensive courses from the perspective of the faculty person involved. Both dialogue groups and individual one-on-one interviews are arranged by the instructor. The course itself is an expanded version of a world religions seminar. The dialogical element was added in an effort to help better prepare students for their future roles as pastors. Robert Hunt's hands-on approach to coordinating dialogue opportunities for his students and his commitment to training facilitators in the methods and objectives of dialogue sessions is admirable. The difficulties that he encounters through this process demonstrate an important aspect of dialogue. It is often difficult to manage the outcomes of such initiatives – especially when the exercise is turned over to a community member whose agenda might not match that of the instructor. Thus, an important lesson for students to learn early on in dialogical pursuits is how to manage their own expectations. Helping students to find value in dialogue even when it does not proceed as planned is a valuable, worthwhile endeavor.

The Perkins case also highlights the importance of student-initiated dialogue. The one-on-one interviews that they conduct are counted as being more meaningful and impactful than the facilitated group discussions. Dr. Hunt even reports that some students form genuine interfaith friendships with their dialogue partners. Not many of the cases presented here indicate that participants move into that level of engagement. This is important not only for the benefit of the individuals involved, but also because of the positive impact the dialogue sessions can have on the non-Christian communities. Dr. Hunt points out how the dialogue exercises are helpful not only for his students as they broaden their understandings of other faith traditions but also for the larger community as it learns more about Christianity and the diversity found within it. The course-inspired dialogue initiatives fulfill a Perkins graduation requirement, but also help non-Christians in the Dallas community better understand their Christian neighbors.

Finally, the Perkins case, not unlike the Philadelphia or Berkeley stories, addresses issues of theological concern related to dialogue. In some ways Perkins is, perhaps, the most theologically conservative of the schools represented here. Questions of Christian mission and evangelism drive many students' agendas. These students emphasize conversion and confession in relation to people of other faiths. Conversely, there is also a healthy measure of universalist belief among the Perkins student body. Dr. Hunt points out that either of these groups can perceive dialogue to be "theologically pointless". The universalists believe that everyone is saved, so dialogue merely introduces the interesting aspects of religious diversity. The conservatives insist that confession of Jesus as savior is essential, and see dialogue aimed at anything other than conversion as irrelevant. It is helpful for students from both of these perspectives to understand the importance of the place of dialogue in the larger framework of Christian theology. Questions of salvation aside, dialogue helps inform a distinctively Christian perspective on other traditions that otherwise would be lacking. Courses such as these help students define and determine their own theological understandings of diversity and dialogue in relation to the doctrines of their churches.

### **What is Missing?**

The case studies presented here have much in common and much to offer. Yet, what is presented here is not the full story of interfaith-oriented theological education. Some readers will be left wondering what is taking place elsewhere – in Canada or the developing world. There are parts of the world where interfaith dialogue is more naturally integrated into daily life and practice. How is dialogue taught outside of the American or Western context? What can U.S. schools learn about interfaith relations from the global south, for example?

Also, what interfaith educational opportunities are being offered in non-Christian religious schools? Most of these case studies tell the story of Christian schools with predominantly Christian student bodies and faculties. If non-Christian schools were designing the pedagogy for engagement, how would it differ? A glimpse of this can be found in a relatively new joint venture between Andover Newton

Theological School and Hebrew College near Boston.<sup>4</sup> These two schools entered into a space-sharing arrangement that in 2008 led (in large part by student initiatives) into a much deeper and richer partnership. The two schools have now created interfaith programming, peer groups and a Center for Interreligious and Communal Leadership Education which provides leadership development opportunities for students from each institution.

Every year a course is co-taught by faculty from Hebrew College and Andover Newton on a topic of mutual interest. At times the course is related to shared texts, and students spend an entire term together unlocking the riches found in a given book. The joint course experiments at these schools prove that students can learn much from the different ways Jews and Christian approach sacred texts. Other courses presented in this book also use text study as a means of engaging the religious “other”, but they do not enter the exercise as deeply as a semester-long course allows.

The learnings from this enterprise of reading scripture together beg many questions about the place of scriptural reasoning as a dialogical exercise. Can texts serve as partners in dialogue? Is there a parallel that can be drawn between text analysis or interpretive approaches to scripture study that require students to hear ancient commentaries in a text and interfaith dialogue that requires participants to ask questions and listen appreciatively to each others' stories? Perhaps answering such questions is left to the purview of the Scriptural Reasoning movement, but deepening such an experience might add value to the courses outlined in this book.

The Hebrew College – Andover Newton model is a good example of two schools coming together and forging a joint program in interreligious relationship-building. Yet, it is apparent that despite the fact that dialogue is a natural and regular part of the bond they share, these schools have not yet fully worked out the best means of incorporating dialogue training into their curricula. The dialogue that takes place between these institutions does so from practical association, student initiative or in the context of shared courses. They have yet to develop a required course that is devoted explicitly to enhancing dialogue skills. When such a course is designed, it will be a unique contribution to the field as it will demonstrate how two

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<sup>4</sup> More information on the cooperative venture may be found at <http://hebrewcollege.edu/interfaith>.

institutions of different faith traditions can develop a mutually-beneficial course in interreligious dialogue. The BAP introduced here represents a dialogue course designed by a non-Christian, however as a result of its location within a Christian institution it presumably adheres to Christian-oriented learning outcomes and standards. One wonders whether a dialogue course designed in a non-Christian institution for a largely non-Christian student body would emphasize different priorities and objectives.

Another question that arises while exploring these case studies is one of orienting principles. For example, it is worth asking whether each school is employing the term “dialogue” in the same way? The operating assumption of these cases seems to indicate that dialogue is inherently good in and of itself and that it is a valid means of relationship building and appreciative understanding. The Catholic types of dialogue presented previously certainly operate on this belief. Yet one could ask whether all traditions value dialogue or employ it for the same reasons and in the same ways. For example, when does the confessional principle of dialogue become evangelization? The cases presented here do not promote dialogue as a means of evangelism – although the Perkins model acknowledges that this is an issue that must be addressed. This begs questions about whether and how dialogue is being taught in more conservative, evangelical institutions.

The need for interfaith engagement is not lost on conservative Evangelicals today, yet one wonders what the objectives are for Evangelicals involved in dialogue. As with the cases presented here, is the goal appreciative understanding of the religious other? A Southern Baptist Convention resolution suggests this is not the case as it affirms conversation for the means of converting the unchurched.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the North American Mission Board offers a certification for Southern Baptists who want to become “certified interfaith evangelism specialists”. This program equips students to present the Christian gospel to non-Christians and combat what are perceived as false teachings. Is this dialogue?

It is clear that preparing the church leadership for engagement with people of other faiths is on the educational agenda for some conservative Christians. But, how do Evangelicals define and approach dialogue? Is it true dialogue that is emerging as a priority for some

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<sup>5</sup> See the Southern Baptist Convention 1994 Resolution “On Roman Catholics” available online at [www.sbc.net/resolutions](http://www.sbc.net/resolutions).

conservative Christian institutions, or have liberals completely co-opted that term? These are important questions for those hoping to understand the overall impact of the move toward dialogue-oriented teaching methodologies. Therefore, in this book it would be interesting to have a better sense of the pedagogies and priorities employed across a wider spectrum of Christian institutions by highlighting (if and where they exist) a case study or two from courses taught at conservative Evangelical schools. The lack of information on the availability of such offerings leaves one wondering whether this book represents a liberal bias or the actual landscape of theological education today.

Such a case might shed light on what dialogue would look like – or what the priorities around dialogue would be – if taken up in a variety of settings. The pluralistic approach to other traditions that is commonly promoted by many scholars has come under much criticism in recent years. Yet, the works of leading pluralist scholars Paul Knitter and Raimon Panikkar are a mainstay on the course syllabi presented here. There is a diversity of opinion on the value of this approach in the wider theology of religions debate, and it is worth exploring other ways of engaging in dialogue that seek out a middle way between the traditional pluralist and exclusivist paradigms. For some individuals engaged in dialogue, maintaining the integrity and importance of witness without necessarily engaging in evangelism is as important as gaining an appreciative understanding of the religious other. This is another reason why including a more conservative voice in the volume might help provide a balance of opinions and approaches.

Another aspect that is missing from this book touches on an important question in the wider field of theological education today: distance learning. Can dialogue take place on-line? The Hartford Seminary course “Dialogue in a World of Difference” suggests that this is difficult if not outright impractical. If a workable method for teaching dialogue on-line can be found, this might allow schools to expand dialogue partners to include those from far off places, and it would certainly extend the reach of the conversation. The very nature of dialogue itself might preclude an on-line option for such courses, yet it is an interesting proposition to consider.

Admittedly, many schools today have international students on campus, and the diversity within North America means that neighbors from other countries are often within easy reach. Yet, contextualization questions arise with dialogue among immigrant populations, and the issues raised by these questions are not the same as issues raised in

dialogue with a person whose context is in another country. For example, Muslims in an immigrant community in the United States might emphasize identity and assimilation issues in a dialogue with American seminary students, whereas Pakistani or Palestinian Muslims living in those countries might have different perspectives and priorities. In this scenario, questions arise about how multicultural training differs from skill-building around dialogue. Is engaging the *religious* other vastly different or actually quite similar to engaging the *cultural* other? Perhaps the answer to this question of international context and participation is found in the marriage of dialogue courses and travel seminars such as are offered at Drew University and some of the schools presented here.

The question of on-line involvement is not merely one of international participation in dialogue, however. If dialogue is an exercise best done face to face, then this has implications for those schools that are committed to offering educational opportunities via distance learning. Many schools today are, indeed, concerned with engaging students who cannot attend regular class sessions, and modern technology is allowing much in the way of expanding the classroom beyond the physical campus. Is there a place for the dialogue course in this model? Are there on-line courses in multiculturalism that could provide a framework for dialogue courses? If on-line courses for dialogue training are unrealistic, then perhaps the intensive course model, such as that presented in the BAP program, is the best option for working students who are not within reasonable regular commuting distance of their programs.

### How Can this Book be Used?

This book and the case studies presented herein can be a useful tool for educators looking to integrate interreligious dialogue into their educational offerings. Lessons learned from the examples set forth can help identify the potential challenges and pitfalls for new dialogue initiatives. They can help the educator shape a program that is specifically targeted to the needs of her institution and the realities of her community. Questions of focus and intention can also help the crafters of nascent educational programs hone their purposes and clarify their educational outcomes in the same way that the courses presented here have helped the respective institutions define their own needs and priorities related to interreligious engagement. It is

important to ask contextual or framing questions at the beginning of planning new courses. For example, does the community need a broader introduction to world religions, experience in the exercise of dialogue, or clarification of what it means to be a person of faith in the midst of many traditions? The honest assessments of what worked and what did not work that these cases provide can help others design a curriculum that is sensitive to the issues that interfaith encounter can unearth.

The different methods used in these cases can also help the educator determine how to shape her course and locate it within the larger educational offerings. For example, will the course be a required part of the curriculum? If so, where will it reside in a student's core courses? Will a course on dialogue be required in the first semester or will a student be allowed to take it at any time during his seminary career? As was demonstrated above, answers to these questions can have implications for the place of interreligious dialogue in a student's theological worldview.

Additionally, the various approaches to teaching demonstrated through this set of case studies should help one to determine what his or her role in the interfaith dialogue should be. In other words, is the professor a facilitator, dialogue participant, tour guide or advisor? The cases presented here introduce different scenarios with mixed results. Reading about the challenges that each faculty member has in his course might help the educator who is new to dialogue carefully to consider the function she will serve in the classroom. Oftentimes productive dialogues can be overwhelmed by those who are more experienced, and in those instances where the faculty member has vast dialogical practice, it might behoove him to take a backseat in these encounters. This can help the student find her own voice in the dialogue.

As noted, all of the cases presented here include an experiential element. This comes in the form of structured dialogues as well as visits to other, or new, places of worship. Depending on the size of the community visited, and the frequency of visits by such groups, instructors might be aware of the potential for community fatigue. While each community visited *en masse* surely appreciates the opportunity to share its traditions and build or deepen relationships with the faculty members and institutions involved, it might become tedious to do the same program with students every year. None of the cases presented here discusses whether this is an issue, whether

compensation is offered to the host site, or whether those sites selected for hosting are "rotated" from year to year so as to avoid burdening the communities visited. Yet, this question of fatigue might be important for schools with small budgets or limited resources. In the months following September 11<sup>th</sup> Muslim leaders often spoke of the volume of invitations they received to speak at churches or discuss their faith with community groups. While they welcomed these opportunities to shed light on an often misunderstood and misrepresented tradition, they did feel the effects of over-committed schedules. Instructors of dialogue courses might be wise to be sensitive to the demands placed on religious leaders from other traditions. Thus, those examples that incorporate pre-existing worship services into the class schedule might provide a better model for integrating student experience into the natural activities of a community than extra dialogue sessions allow. Additionally, those courses that require students to find their own new worship experiences might have the least impact on the community as it is much easier to accommodate one visitor than twenty.

The syllabi and associated reading lists provide a good starting point for a bibliography on the topic of dialogue. The world of publishing around interfaith dialogue, theology of religions and interreligious encounter is vast and growing. Thus, the readings recommended in the case studies can help to narrow the options and lift up some of the "classics" in the field.

Educators who are new to interreligious dialogue in their communities can learn much from the examples presented here. This book provides helpful resources for thinking through the benefits and challenges of cultivating dialogue skills in students. The schools presented here are to be commended for taking the lead on this often neglected aspect of theological education. If every theological school in North America were to add one course in interreligious dialogue to its catalogue, a new religious leadership might begin to emerge. This leadership would know how to navigate the issues that diversity entails and would be better able to help their communities deepen their own faith while exploring the religious difference around them.