

STUDIEN ZUR
INTERKULTURELLEN
GESCHICHTE
DES CHRISTENTUMS

STUDIES IN THE
INTERCULTURAL
HISTORY
OF CHRISTIANITY

ETUDES
D'HISTOIRE
INTERCULTURELLE
DU CHRISTIANISME

Richard Friedli / Jan A. B. Jongeneel /
Klaus Koschorke / Theo Sundermeier /
Werner Ustorf (eds.)

Intercultural Perceptions and Prospects of World Christianity

EXTRACT

150



PETER LANG

Introduction

Jan A.B. Jongeneel, Werner Ustorf

In 1975 Richard Friedli (Fribourg), Walter J. Hollenweger (Birmingham), and Hans Jochen Margull (Hamburg) started the series *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*, published by Peter Lang (Frankfurt am Main), which nowadays is the largest series in the wide field of missiology, intercultural theology, and comparative religion/theology. In 2009, at a meeting hosted by Theo Sundermeier in Heidelberg, the present editors of the series decided to celebrate the publication of no less than one hundred and fifty volumes in the series by drafting together, as editors, volume 150, in order to evaluate and rethink “inter-cultural (theology)”, a task that belongs to the essence and purpose of the series.

Each of the five current editors has contributed to this volume. Two of the founding editors, Margull and Hollenweger, are included here by way of papers they had published in the 70s and which represent the sense of theological innovation (and the search for a new terminology connected with it) that motivated the establishment of the book series. These are papers to which, at the same time, it is difficult to gain access to. We are grateful to the Christian Literary Society in Chennai and to Birmingham University for having given permission to reprint these significant materials.

The various contributions are largely organised chronologically according to the point in time when the respective authors became members of the editorial board. The late Margull (1925-82) opens the discussion. He is followed by the two other founding fathers: Hollenweger and Friedli. Over the years, four other scholars were one by one appointed as editorial board members: Theo Sundermeier (Heidelberg), Jan Arie Bastiaan Jongeneel (Utrecht), Werner Ustorf (Birmingham) and Klaus Koschorke (München). The previous and present editors contributed one article each to this volume, but Friedli being still an active founding father was also given the opportunity to reflect on the overall narrative of the book series by way of a postscript.

From the very beginning in 1975, the series reflects West-Europe’s multi-linguistic orientation and approach. The name of the series is equally advertised in German, English, and French: *Studien*, *Studies*, *Études*. Although the vast majority of the volumes is published in English, there also are volumes in German and French. The current editors and the publishing house want to maintain this multi-linguistic approach. Therefore, the contributions to this volume are drafted in the three European languages mentioned above.

Margull's text describes, analyses, and criticizes a Mediterranean theology that was unprepared to envision the (new) concept of "Tertiaterranity" or "Thirdworldness". The Christian mission of the colonial era has its roots in Mediterranean Christendom. But now, he says, it is time to develop a "more broad-minded missiology", which dissociates itself from both the pietistic and liberal missionary theologies of the West and takes seriously the writings of Third World theologians such as M.M. Thomas (1916-96). Margull states categorically that the history of Christianity is continued in its "thirdworldness". The theology of mission, any theology of mission it would seem, is unthinkable without having taken into account its Third World dimension or the Christian experience in the South.

Hollenweger's contribution sketches the church of Corinth in the time of the New Testament, with its different social groups and connected conflicts, as a laboratory for "intercultural theology". To understand its tensions and struggles the author combines the contemporary method of "narrative exegesis" with the results of classical "critical exegesis". His article, one of the first ever written on the subject of intercultural theology, ends with a list of maxims which, he thinks, are characteristic of intercultural theology. "Intercultural theology" is viewed as an academic discipline in its own right. Though it is in a permanent conversation with other forms of Western theology, the search for "a body of Christ theology" is its ultimate goal.

In a broad approach, Friedli pays attention to the (new) perception of "interculturality". The fundamental human needs are the point of departure of his empirical and normative sociological reflections. A major issue is whether religions have indeed the potential and competence for reconciliation, over against the potential for promoting conflicting views and actions such as those shown by fundamentalists. The author is convinced that the fundamental human needs, which are qualified as intercultural, can only be addressed properly when space is created for responsibility and people are ready to live with ambivalences, not focusing on belief-systems but rather on people and their communities.

Sundermeier is well aware that not everybody in the West is willing to do theology interculturally. His article deals with intercultural theology in the context of global developments. It starts with an analysis of the processes involved - including processes running counter to the intercultural dimension: ethnicism and ethnocentrism. Thereafter, the author turns to intercultural theology as opposed to classical or established theology. He compares this new form of doing theology to the notion of intercultural *Germanistik*. He observes several points of parallelism. Using Friedli's term of "intercultural circulation", he closes his contribution with some examples of doing theology interculturally.

Jongeneel starts his reflection by clarifying the division of missiology as an academic discipline into three sub-disciplines: missionary philosophy, missionary science, and missionary theology. Thereafter he turns to the nature and implications of doing philosophy, science, and theology interculturally. In the final part of his contribution the link between missionary and intercultural theology is discussed. He holds the view that “missionary theology” essentially is intercultural theology but that, the other way round, “intercultural theology” is not necessarily missionary theology.

Ustorf deals with the origin and historical developments of “intercultural (theology)”. This is an updated version of a paper published in 2008 and we are grateful to Brill Publishers for being able to include it here. After having made some terminological observations, he investigates the start of the debate and the conceptualization of the topic concerned, with special reference to the founding fathers of the series: is missiology succeeded by intercultural theology? Can, in its wake, intercultural theology be equated with interreligious theology? At the end of his analysis he views the terms and concepts of “convivencia” (cf. Sundermeier) and “hospitality” as proper elements of doing theology interculturally in the contemporary global setting.

Koschorke as a church historian calls attention to the polycentric structures of World Christianity and its history. Polycentrism is not only a typical characteristic of World Christianity after the ending of the colonial era. It has been part of the history of Christianity from its beginning in the New Testament. The author illustrates his view by pointing to various examples taken from the expansion history of Christianity in modern times. Interactions between different parts of the world go hand in hand with regional expressions and initiatives. A global history of Christianity deals not only with the denominational but also the cultural plurality in context.

As editor of all 150 volumes of the series Friedli wrote a personal postscript in which he connected the notion of “interculturality” with terms and phenomena such as “intertheology”, “interreligiosity”, “interworld” and “interconnectedness”. This postscript also functions as a foreword or prologue, in so far as it expresses hope regarding the future of the series and could, therefore, be read in conjunction with this introduction. It does not elaborate scenarios but composes some dimensions of “interculturality” which can be taken into account by future authors. After all, “intercultural” has been and continues to be a “generative word” (Paolo Freire).

The members of the editorial board differ in opinion and expertise, but they are one in emphasizing the need and relevance of doing theology interculturally.

In the course of the process they established strong links with one another. To be concrete: Ustorf, a former Ph.D. candidate of Margull in Hamburg and, then, doing his second doctorate with Sundermeier in Heidelberg, became the successor of Hollenweger in Birmingham; Jongeneel was the main editor of Hollenweger's *Festschrift*, entitled *Pentecost, Mission and Ecumenism: Essays on Intercultural Theology* (1992), to which Friedli, Jongeneel, Sundermeier, and Ustorf contributed articles.

The editors and authors of this volume are convinced that volume 150 will help Christian theology to be done more thoroughly, adequately, and effectively in the contemporary global and local setting. On the one hand, the volume can and will contribute to the gaining of new insights into the nature of doing Biblical studies, church history, and systematic and practical theology as well as comparative theology interculturally. On the other hand, it can and will help us to rethink and do theology and religious studies always in an interdisciplinary way. Although the future of Christian theology, and even the future of religious studies in Europe is uncertain, it is quite clear that its agenda needs to be shaped by and in the contemporary setting: to stick to the essential sources and, at the same time, to move forward with an entirely open, global, and cross-cultural mind-set.