

Intercultural Theology, Volume One: Intercultural Hermeneutics
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Landmark Textbook on Christianity and Culture Translated into English

Intercultural Theology by Henning Wrogemann is the most comprehensive textbook on the subject of Christianity and culture available today. Now translated into English, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, the first of this three-volume work, is the first English-language introduction to the field of intercultural theology.

Bringing together missiology, religious studies, social science research, and Christian theology, the field of intercultural theology is a fresh attempt to rethink the discipline of theology in light of the diversity and pluriformity of Christianity today.

This first volume on intercultural hermeneutics introduces the term “intercultural theology” and investigates what it means to understand another cultural context. In addition to surveying different hermeneutical theories and concepts of culture, Wrogemann assesses how intercultural understanding has taken place throughout the history of Christian mission. Wrogemann also provides an extensive discussion of contextual theologies with a special focus on African theologies.

The forthcoming volumes survey theologies of mission both past and present and explore theologies of religion and interreligious relationships.

Because Christianity is not only a global but also an intercultural phenomenon, *Intercultural Theology* is an indispensable resource for all people—especially students, pastors, and scholars—interested in exploring the defining issues of Christian identity and practice in the context of an increasingly intercultural and interreligious world.

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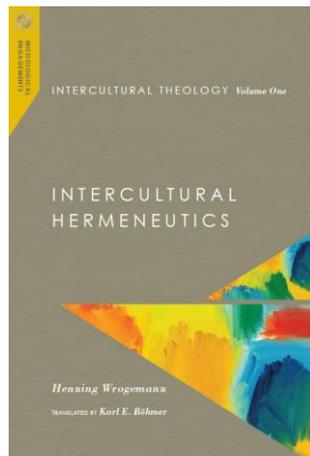
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What Intercultural Theology Is All About

In the twenty-first century, Christianity has become a global religious configuration with many regional variations. These variations within Christianity imply that local Christian actors are allowing local contexts to shape their message and way of life to a significant extent. At the same time, tensions arise because the values and behaviors of one context, such as West Africa, sometimes clash with those of a different context, such as India. This directs our attention to intercontinental and intercultural relationships between the various Christian churches and movements in Africa, Asia, the two Americas, Europe, Oceania, and elsewhere: Who gets to decide what is "Christian," and on what basis? Does "Old Europe" possess the superior authority on the grounds of its centuries-old doctrinal tradition, or do the churches in other continents possess the superior authority because they have greater missionary vitality and are perhaps more contextual?

This brings us to the research area of the discipline that has come to be known in European countries as "intercultural theology." What is intercultural theology all about? For starters, it is about developing awareness of the wealth of differences in the global scene when it comes to the Christian way of life. It begins with something as simple as appreciating and understanding the outlandishness of churches and congregations in other cultures. In other words, this is about the issue of intercultural hermeneutics. After all, differences exist not only between various confessions and denominations but also between various cultural forms of the same denomination, such as between Baptist entities in the Congo, Thailand, and North America. What do these forms look like? Is it possible for "theology" to be expressed in songs, dances, and rituals? To what extent may theological doctrines differ from each other?

But intercultural theology, understood as an intercultural hermeneutics of Christian entities worldwide, is about more than just appreciating the differences. It is also concerned with what constitutes the *unity* or at least the *commonality* within intercultural ecumenism. In this regard, we will need to address some issues which are being discussed in North America under the heading of "World Christianity." Still, *intercultural theology* places a different emphasis, since its aim is not to play the Christianities of other continents off against the European history of Christianity but rather to help people progress beyond binary interpretive models and to come to a better understanding. . . .

The three volumes of this textbook are written in the awareness that the discipline of intercultural theology will fundamentally determine the future of theological education in all parts of the world. It is not sufficient merely to describe global Christianity from a historic perspective. This is about much more than that. It is about seeking to *understand* as far as possible the variations among local Christianities, their forms and contexts, and their missions and interreligious relationships. This calls for a *descriptive* approach. Then again,

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BOOK EXCERPT

“Intercultural theology takes a new approach that builds on the tradition of mission studies and pursues it in a new way.”

this is about factoring ourselves into the equation and taking a theological position with respect to these discourses. This in turn calls for a *normative* approach. After all, if the intercultural theologian were *to refuse* to take a position, then she might well be accused of attempting to take a neutral position from which to study all the other phenomena as mere “research objects.” This would factor her own views out of the equation and eliminate the possibility of criticism by other brothers and sisters. That is to say that, in this sense, intercultural theology thrives on the tension occasioned by a descriptive and a normative approach. For this reason, it resorts to an *academically responsible* methodology, drawing from the fields of religious studies, mission studies, and cultural studies. At the same time, it uses approaches from the *theology* of mission, the theology of religion, and the theology of ecumenism. This means that intercultural theology takes a new approach that builds on the tradition of mission studies and pursues it in a new way.

– Taken from the preface to the English edition