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A RESPONSE TO AMIR HUSSAIN'S "THINKING INTERRELIGIOUSLY WITH MUSLIMS: 'A PRACTICAL, NOT PRIMARILY A THEORETICAL MATTER'"

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REMEMBERING THE PAST AND IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS: THE CREATIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE POWER AT THE BORDERS

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Good evening. Thank you, Amir, for such a rich and discerning talk on the import of "thinking interreligiously with Muslims." It is apparent that both your personal, spiritual autobiography and your professional career illustrate the creative and constructive potential that emerges when Catholics and Catholic institutions intentionally decide to think interreligiously with Muslims and the Islamic traditions historically and presently. My gratitude also extends to Frank Clooney, without whose mentorship and attention I would not be where I am today in my academic career, and without whom I would never have met my spouse—but that's a story for another time. Thank you for this invitation. Finally, I extend my gratitude to Executive Director Mary Jane Ponyik and all other organizers of the Seventy-Sixth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America in Atlanta, along with the food service, technology, cleaning, and other hospitality staff making our stay possible.

I would like to reaffirm that we are currently conversing on the land of the Muscogee Creek Nation, and that I do my teaching, research, writing, gardening, parenting, cooking, eating, playing, and praying on Lenapehoking, the ancestral lands of the Lenni Lenape indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Some may say that these acknowledgements are merely *pro forma*—perhaps. However, in this case, thinking interreligiously with Muslims requires recognizing how Old World relations with Muslims and Jews were extended and mapped onto the religious and racial other in the New World, from indigenous peoples to Black America to immigrant America. Thinking interreligiously with Muslims should therefore be a decolonial project.

In responding to Amir, I plan to make two points, both related to borders, border talk, and the creative and/or destructive ideas they produce. Amir's talk illustrates how the in-between spaces wherein Muslims and Christians meet have power—power for creation, but also power for destruction.

First, Amir's subtitle to his "Thinking Interreligiously with Muslims" is "a practical, not merely theoretical matter." And how true is that! A rather obvious point that somehow remains overlooked practically is that Catholic theology has always been interreligious—Jewish thought, Greek and Hellenic thought, Islamic thought, North African indigenous ideas, European pagan ideas, and so on into the global missionary movements, colonial projects, and postcolonial world—when has Catholic theology ever not been interreligious and intercultural? We really need to stop lying to ourselves! Therefore, embedding interreligious engagement within departments of religion and theology at Catholic institutions and in scholarship is not as novel as some suggest. Here, the borders between Christian-majority regions and Muslim-majority regions historically have engendered creative permutations of divine revelation and its interpretation. Nonetheless, our religiously plural world is one in which religiously minoritized communities suffer the brunt of political and economic marginalization—and therefore justice demands that Catholic theology is performed interreligiously. Catholics were once marginalized in the American context. We should now use our relative political power and economic advantage to make space for non-Christian theologies in our departments—from hiring practices to courses and scholarship. That's the first point.

The second point: using theological engagement with the Islamic traditions as an example, I seek to underscore the necessity of integrating Catholic theology and comparative theology with the critical study of religion and interreligious studies. In brief, doing Catholic theology interreligiously with Muslims demands that we recognize the social process called the racialization of religion and how dominant global political and economic structures continue to marginalize Muslim communities from Dearborn, Michigan and the Banlieues of Paris, to Yemen, Xinjiang Province (China), Palestine, and beyond.[1] We cannot attend to Islamic thought on paper—be it classical or post-classical Islamic philosophy, theology, art, and spirituality—without attending to the lived realities of societies of Muslims worldwide who are daily experiencing global anti-Muslim racism.[2] Here, the borders between Christian-majority regions and Muslim-majority regions historically have produced not a little bit of conflict and race-making practices—such as the *limpieza de sangre* system in the Iberian peninsula and the racialization of Muslims and Jews.

[1] "The *racialization of religion* is a process in which particular religions are associated with certain physical appearances and human differences come to be treated as absolute, fundamental, and heritable, like race." Khyati Joshi, *White Christian Privilege* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 46.

[2] The danger of attending to theology, spirituality, and "culture talk" to the exclusion of global political and economic histories of oppression risks occluding the ways in which neocolonialism, empire, and anti-Muslim racism shape the lives of contemporary Muslims. For an example of this, see Axel Takacs, "Critical Pedagogies in the Interfaith/Interreligious Studies Classroom: From the Editor-in-Chief," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* no. 36, 1-8, especially 4-8 (https://irstudies.org/index.php/jirs/article/view/763).

FIRST POINT: THE CREATIVE POWER AT CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM BORDERS

Catholic theology has always been interreligious. Amir offered an autobiographical account of his journey from Pakistan to Canada and California, settling down at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles and now serving as chair of the department; so let me offer one similarly, though briefly. People often ask me how I came to study what I study. I honestly do not recall any single event that thrust me into this learning trajectory. But, like Augustine and other great autobiographers, I can tell a story that connects the dots and maps my present self onto my past self. I began and finished my career as a computer science major at St. Louis University. I had some interest in theology but did not pursue it. However, those were the days when even a computer science major had to take three classes in theology, three classes in philosophy, and three classes in history. Yes, those were the "good ole days." It was in those required courses that I decided I could no longer ignore my intellectual and spiritual passion for theology and philosophy. So, I added a theology major, along with history and philosophy minors. I finished up my two degrees in computer science and theology.

In taking classes on Islam, both in undergraduate and, then, later in graduate school, I became intrigued by the biblical imaginary and philosophical languages shared between Islamic and Christian traditions. I found it analytically fascinating to learn how two traditions with so much shared vocabulary developed in their own unique ways. Even more fascinating was the historical, lived realities of communities of Christians and Muslims exchanging theological ideas, and how the development of medieval scholastic theology and even Christian spirituality were shaped in conversation with the Islamic traditions and in proximity to societies of Muslims, at and beyond the border, as it were. In this case, cross-religious and cross-cultural transmissions engendered creative contributions to Catholic thought. Indeed, one may ask perhaps rhetorically: "when has Catholic theology ever *not* been interreligious?" Amir made note of the work of Michael Marmura and David Burrell and their scholarship on Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), or Avicenna, whose Islamic philosophy made possible later Christian medieval scholastic theology. Now, allow me to get technical for a moment. What we must recall is that Ibn Sīnā's arguably most formative contribution to medieval scholastic theology—the distinction between essence and existence—was itself inspired by earlier *kalām*, or Islamic theological, arguments on the distinction between a "thing" (*shay'*) and its existence. Furthermore, their largely non-Aristotelian understanding of "thingness" (*shay'iyya*) comes from the Qur'ān and Qur'ānic vocabulary, such as Surah 16 (*an-nahl*), vs. 40: "If We ever will *a thing* to exist, all We say is: 'Be!' And it is!'" So how do we reimagine the history of Catholic theology differently, that is, interreligiously? For example, in elaborating his metaphysics of glory, the twentieth-century Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, contends that it is only through the "real distinction" between *actus essendi* and the various *essentiae* (existence and the various essences), "*uniquely* grasped by Thomas Aquinas,"[3] that a theology of glory emerges able to perceive the wonder of

[3] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. 5, The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Oliver Davies, John Saward, Rowen Douglas

being, of creation. Ibn Sīnā himself was reading *kalām* arguments on this distinction and so was shaped by Islamic theological discourses as much as Aristotle—who gave him other conceptual language to express it.[4] Well, then, without Quranic revelation, proclaimed by Muhammad, without very early *kalām* interpretations of the Qur'ān, we might never have had that distinction. In this case, we can perceive the wonder of being and creation in a Catholic idiom because of an early Islamic theological hermeneutics of revelation.[5] Similar stories could be told about Spanish mysticism, Dante's Divine Comedy, Syriac-speaking Christian ascetics in the Levant, and more.

Williams, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press; Crossroads Publications, 1991), 446.

[4] See Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 251ff, and David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). Wisnovsky demonstrates how Ibn Sīnā first engaged the categories (such as *shay'iyya*, or thingness) of the *mutakallimūn*, or Islamic theologians, when discussing the essence/existence distinction. Later, he adopts the language of Arabic Aristotle and al-Fārābī (d. 950): "Part of the reason for this is that Avicenna straddled two worlds: the world of *falsafa* and the world of *kalām*. His discussions of the relationship between thing and existent are clearly informed by previous *kalām* debates: both the terminology and the issues at stake are identical. But when Avicenna adopts the language of the Arabic Aristotle and of al-Fārābī, a slight conceptual shift is detectable. Instead of analyzing the relationship between thing and existent, Avicenna speaks of the relationship between essence (*māhiyya*, literally "whatness") and existence (*wujūd*). The term he uses for essence, *māhiyya*, comes from the Arabic version of the various logic texts that constitute the *Organon*, in which a definition, when properly constructed, is held to indicate the essence (*māhiyya*) of a thing" (Robert Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard Taylor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 109). It is true that Balthasar does not ignore the pivotal importance Ibn Sīnā had in the development of Christian theology, to be sure. See volume V of *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, the Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 10, 17, 48, 91, and 560. In later works of his trilogy, he effectively equates Thomas's and Ibn Sīnā's ontology. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Prolegomena, Vol. 1*, trans. G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 550-551, as well as *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Dramatis Personae: Man in God, Vol. 2*, trans. G. Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 245–246. What Balthasar does not know is that this distinction was informed by Islamic theology first, and was arguably made possible because of early *kalām* arguments over thingness and their interpretations of Qur'ānic revelation.

[5] Finally, what Catholic systematic theologians and historians of theology, particularly medieval scholastic theology, fail to realize is that historically parallel to the development of Christian thought, Ibn Sīnā's distinction had foundational and formative impact on the development of Islamic theology, philosophy, and the *ṣūfī*-philosophical amalgam of classical and post-classical Islamic intellectual thought. This distinction produces a unique and different tradition, from Ibn ʿArabī to Mulla Ṣadrā (d. 1640) to contemporary Islamic thought in Iran—all worthy of further investigation in a comparative light. Most scholars of medieval theology simply wish to learn about the so-called "Islamic Golden Age" of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as if that is when Islamic philosophy and theology peaked, thereby equating Islamic philosophy as a mere conveyer of Greek thought to European Christian thought. This could not be further from the truth, as Islamic theology, philosophy, and Sufism coalesced into a *ṣūfī*-philosophical amalgam that offered creative and innovative interpretations, distinct from how Thomas Aquinas and his successors developed it. See, for example, Robert Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope of Arabic Philosophical Commentary in Post-Classical (ca.1100-1900) Islamic

Let me return to borders and connect what I have said to Amir's point about Spanish-speaking Catholic communities in the South, at the border, on the border, and beyond the border: We do well to learn from Gloria Anzaldúa and her mestiza or *nepantla* theory. As many Mexican, Mexican American, and indigenous people will readily proclaim, being situated within and between borders facilitates hybridity, syncretism, and assuming multiple religious and cultural identities. Anzaldúa uses the language of the mestiza and the related notion of *nepantla*, which is a Nahuatl term for middle or in-betweenness. Learning from Chicana cultural, feminist, and queer theory, we benefit from recognizing that being mixed points to a capacity to embrace ambivalence and affirm the fuzziness of religious and cultural traditions; from this we may affirm the permeable nature of all boundaries and the artificial nature of all borders. This contrasts with the popular and conservative expectation that our identities and traditions are bounded territories, fixed, monolithic, and sharply demarcated. The Nahuatl word, *nepantla*, refers specifically to the space between two figurative or literal bodies of water, and there is an Qur'ānic Arabic term that refers similarly to the space wherein two bodies of water meet: the *barzakh* (Qur'ān 55:19-20: "He released the two seas, they meet, between them is a *barzakh* they do not exceed.") The *barzakh*, according to Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240), the famous thirteenth-century mystical philosopher, is a liminal space situated between two things, "but it is not identical to any of those two things, though it possesses the power of both."[6] Keep this in mind, it possesses the *power* of both. Likewise, the *barzakh* "is nothing but the imagination"[7] and finally, "there is nothing in the world but *barzakh*s"[8] that is, the whole world is a collection of in-between, liminal spaces, and for our purposes we can say, a collection of meeting points between religious and cultural traditions. Whether *nepantla* or *barzakh*, both speak to the intelligence, imagination, and proficiency to see the world not in terms of rigidly demarcated religions or cultures, but rather as mutually co-constituting and co-dependent, ever transforming imaginaries and traditions. To cultivate this interreligious and intercultural intelligence and proficiency, drawing from Christine Hong's excellent

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Intellectual History: Some Preliminary Observations," in *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, ed. Peter Adamson, Han Balthussen, and M.W.F. Stone, vol. 2 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2004), 149-191, and Robert Wisnovsky, "One Aspect of The Avicennian Turn in Sunni Theology," in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14, 1 (2004): 65–100. See also Ayman Shihadeh, "From Al-Ghazali to Al-Razi: 6th/12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theologyl," in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15, 1 (2005), 141–179, and Ayman Shihadeh, *Sufism and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). The existence-essence distinction elaborated by Ibn Sīnā merged with the School of Ibn ʿArabī in the commentaries of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274) and Dawūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 1350), both disciples of Ibn ʿArabī. This *ṣūfī*-philosophical amalgam continued to be explicated and constructively developed by many innovative authors from the fourteenth century until today (particularly by Iranian scholars). Arguably, the most influential philosopher within this *ṣūfī*-philosophical tradition was Mulla Ṣadrā Shīrāzī.

[6] Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkīyah*, ed. Osman Yahya (Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), I.304.20 (Vol.Page.Line). This is found in Chapter 63 "Concerning the Recognition of the Subsistence of the People in the *Barzarkh*/Liminal Space Between this World and the Resurrection."

[7] Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkīyah*, I.304.20-22.

[8] Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkīyah*, III.156.27

book, *Decolonial Futures*, is to see traditions as constantly changing in relation to each other.[9] In this case, where religious traditions meet, there is the power of imagination to create something new.

But thinking Catholic interreligiously must consider the social and power constructs that shape our world. True, history and present-day experiences demonstrate how syncretism, hybridity, and interreligious and intercultural transformation and relations were and are the norm. However, the hegemony of our current political and economic power constructs continues to marginalize religiously and culturally minoritized communities, and so we must take this global reality into consideration when we theologize interreligiously—especially with Muslims. As Amir reminded us, Catholics were very much once "strangers in a foreign land," excluded and marginalized in the United States. Given the relative power and advantage of Catholic institutions of higher learning today, we must make space for non-Christian theologies and scholars in our departments, courses, scholarship, and praxis. Doing Catholic theology interreligiously requires structural changes to Catholic departments. There is, of course, neither a straightforward nor one-size-fits-all strategy in making Catholic departments of religion and theological studies interreligious. It is no easy task to negotiate, on the one hand, the import of the Catholic sense of "tradition" with, on the other, the necessity to move creatively and interreligiously beyond tradition all at the same time. Though, if we recognize "tradition" to be always ever only interreligious, the tension can be reconciled.

SECOND POINT: THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER AT CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM BORDERS

In the first point, borders engendered creative and imaginative theologies—philosophy, spirituality, poetry, art, and more. The borders between Muslim and Christian communities produced imaginative interpretations of the Christian and Islamic revelations, often in implicit or explicit conversation with each other. In this case, the power of the liminal space, the *barzakh* or *nepantla*, is creative, imaginative, and generally positive. In this second point, however, borders engender not merely conflict, but race-making ideologies and destruction. Here, the power of the liminal space is destructive, or at least harnessed for destruction because of human brokenness. Over the course of my academic career, it has become clear to me that the history of Christian interactions with Muslims in the medieval period shaped the European history of colonization, warfare, and empire building from 1492 until 2022—from Ayiti or Hispaniola to Iraq, from Turtle Island to Yemen and so much more in between, from the Spanish encomienda system and the Transatlantic Slave Trade to the half a million children dead from malnutrition in Iraq because of US sanctions in the 90s, or the 38 million mostly Muslim refugees caused by post-9/11 US-Led wars, also the cause of 200,000 Iraqi civilian deaths, 71,000 civilian deaths in the Afghanistan/Pakistan warzone, 250,000 deaths in Yemen since the 2014 US-backed war, and so on. While a coincidence, it is certainly ominous that 1492 marks both the

[9] See Christine Hong, *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), as well as my review of her book in the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* no. 33, 113-116 (https://irstudies.org/index.php/jirs/article/view/667).

beginning of the enslavement, sex trafficking, genocide, gendercide, and land dispossession of the indigenous in the Americas and the expulsion of Jews from Spain, to be followed later by the expulsion of Muslims—*conversos* and *Moriscos*.

Consensus among scholars is that 1492 marks the invention of race, even if there is significant evidence to suggest race-making was happening throughout the medieval period.[10] Suffice it to say, the colonization of the Americas by Europeans coincided with the development and implementation of the *limpieza de sangre* system, or blood purity laws, in the Iberian peninsula and the racialization of Muslims and Jews, which carried over into the racialized practices against the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Africa. Junaid Rana summarizes it best:

> The racialization of Islam emerged from the Old World, was placed on New World indigenous peoples, and subsequently took on a continued significance in relation to Black America and the world of Muslim immigrants. Thus, the category of Muslim in the U.S. is simultaneously a religious category and one that encompasses a broad race concept that connects a history of Native America to Black America to immigrant America in the consolidation of anti-Muslim racism.[11]

From this point a critical inquiry emerges: how do we think Catholic interreligiously in a social context that has racialized religions—Muslim, Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and so on? The critical study of religion and interreligious studies tells us that we can no longer

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[10] Whether "race" existed in the Middle Ages is an open argument; see, e.g., Chapter 8 ("Was There Race before Modernity? The Example of 'Jewish' Blood in Late Medieval Spain") in David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). However, it seems certain that at least "race-making" was a process that began well before 1492, and as early as the eleventh century, as Geraldine Heng argues. Her thesis is "that 'race' is one of the primary names we have—a name we retain for the strategic, epistemological, and political commitments it recognizes—attached to a repeating tendency, of the gravest import, to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups. Race-making thus operates as specific historical occasions in which strategic essentialisms are posited and assigned through a variety of practices and pressures, so as to construct a hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment" (Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 27). The process inventing race is intertwined with theology, which employed religious difference "both socioculturally *and* biopolitically: subjecting peoples of a detested faith, for instance, to a political theology that can biologize, define, and essentialize an entire community as fundamentally and absolutely different in an interknotted cluster of ways. Nature and the sociocultural should not thus be seen as bifurcated spheres in medieval race-formation: they often crisscross in the practices, institutions, functions, and laws of a political—and a *bio*politica—theology operationalized on the bodies and lives of individuals and groups" (Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 27). The story of Islamophobia may go even further back to Christian supersessionist discourse; see, Axel Takacs, "Undoing and Unsaying Islamophobia: Toward a Restorative and Praxis-Oriented Catholic Theology with Islam," *Horizons*, 48 (2021): 320–366.

[11] Janaid Rana, "The Story of Islamophobia," *Souls* 9:2, 151.

essentialize religions—they are not monolithic essences abstracted from the world—rather, they are embodied, emplaced, and enacted in the world, and they have been racialized by ideologies and social structures whether we like it or not.

Furthermore, Alan Mikhail has demonstrated how the threat of Islam and Muslims in Europe fueled the colonization of the Americas: "Islam was the mold that cast the history of European racial and ethnic thinking in the Americas, as well as the history of warfare in the Western Hemisphere."[12] If the history of Muslim–Christian conflict in part produced our current unjust and inequitable global economic and political racist order, then Muslim–Christian solidarity, co-resistance, and co-creation will be necessary to repair the harm and to create a more just and equitable society.[13]

The recent encyclical by Pope Francis compels us to think Catholic interreligiously and especially with Muslims. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis implicitly models how interreligious thinking with Muslims moves beyond dialogue and toward co-resistance and co-creation.[14] Together we can resist structures and ideologies of oppression and

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[12] Alan Mikhail, *God's Shadow: Sultan Selim, His Ottoman Empire, and the Making of the Modern World* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2020), 396. "Filtering their experiences in the Americas through the lens of their wars with Muslims, Europeans in the New World engaged in a new version of their very old Crusades, a new kind of Catholic jihad. Long after the many Matamoros—Moor-slayers—who sailed to the Americas aboard Columbus's ships were dead themselves, Islam would continue to forge the histories of both Europe and the New World and the relationship between the two" (386). Elsewhere, Mikhail concludes: "Indeed, the idea that Islam is a deep existential threat to the Americas is one of the oldest cultural tropes in the New World. Its history is as long as the history of European colonialism and disease. It must, therefore, be a part of any understanding of the history of the Americas. After 1492, European colonialism, as we have seen, folded the Americas into the long history of European-Islamic relations. Seeing American history in this way allows us to give a more holistic accounting of the American past. The history of the United States does not begin with Plymouth Rock and Thanksgiving. The first European foothold in what would become the continental United States was not Jamestown, but a Spanish Catholic outpost in Florida. The origins of the American people must obviously include the history of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas, West Africans, and the Jewish and Catholic subjects of mainland European polities. This history must also include Muslims, both African slaves and Selim's Ottomans, for Islam was the mold that cast the history of European racial and ethnic thinking in the Americas, as well as the history of warfare in the Western Hemisphere" (396).

[13] See a forthcoming article by Axel Takacs in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* tentatively entitled "Drawing Near to God, Drawing Near to Others: On *Fratelli Tutti*, Friendship (*Walāya*), and Muslim-Christian Co-Resistance."

[14] Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (hereafter cited as *FT*).

A forthcoming article by Takacs in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* in part argues for this reading of *Fratelli Tutti*. However, a subsection of the encyclical entitled "Beginning with the least" (*FT* 233-235) nearly explicitly makes this case: "Building social friendship does not only call for rapprochement between groups who took different sides at some troubled period of history," say, Christians and Muslims, "but also for a renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society" (*FT* 233). Here we see Francis prioritize solidarity (co-resistance and co-creation) over dialogue, without excluding the import of the latter. He then adds, "For peace 'is not merely absence of war but a tireless commitment – especially on the part of those of us charged with greater responsibility – to recognize, protect

create structures and interreligious theologies of liberation. Indeed, global demographics suggest that Christians and Muslims are increasing in numbers at a rate faster than other religious traditions or the religiously disaffiliated. Furthermore, it is global majority Christians and Muslims of Latin and South America, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, and Asia that are suffering the brunt of unjust political and economic ideologies and systems that are the target of Pope Francis's critiques in *Fratelli Tutti*. He names neoliberalism, but we do well to add neocolonial, racial capitalism, from China to the United States. Moreover, 76 percent of all migrants in the world identify as Muslim or Christian; that number will increase alongside anthropogenic climate disasters. These demographic trends underscore the fact that Islam, Christianity, and Muslim-Christian relations will be a necessary feature for any successful movement for social justice and peacebuilding in the world.

But Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* acknowledges the necessity for both spiritual and embodied transformation, personal and political transformation. *Fratelli Tutti* is in effect a theology of religions that has moved well beyond questions of whether and how revelation, truth, and salvation are found in other religious traditions; it already assumes that this is the case. Instead, it is an implicit theology of religions that prioritizes the marginalized and asks how other religious traditions provide avenues for interreligious co-resistance and co-creation.

So Christian–Muslim borders have been marked both by imaginative creations of interreligious and intercultural theologies and by destructive ideologies and systems of race-making, warfare, colonialism, and empire-building. These are the two stories—the two parallel histories of the borders between Christians and Muslims—that must be told about Christian–Muslim relations. As Catholic theologians and educators, we have the responsibility, yes, to tell both stories, but also to construct a future yet unknown in which we decide to co-create in solidarity not merely with our Muslim siblings and neighbors, but with the many non-Christian siblings and neighbors around and among us. How do we do this?

First, quite simply and obviously, are course offerings. For example, the courses I offer fall broadly under three categories.

- First are the courses on Islam in and of itself: Islamic Spirituality and Mysticism, Arts and Literature of Islam and Muslim Cultures, Islamic Theology and Philosophy, Islamic Liberation Theology, and so on. These allow students to learn of the rich, complex, and beautiful expression of theology in the Islamic traditions historically and presently among societies of Muslims in their search for beauty, truth, goodness, and justice.

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and concretely restore the dignity, so often overlooked or ignored, of our brothers and sisters, so that they can see themselves as the principal protagonists of the destiny of their nation'" (*FT* 233, citing Francis, Meeting *with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps*, Maputo, Mozambique [September 5, 2019]: *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 6, 2019, 6). Those of us "charged with greater responsibility" are those of us privileged with power in our current global politico-economic structure.

- Second are the comparative courses: Here, students understand the historical interactions among Islamic and Christian traditions and how they mutually shaped each other, and juxtapose theologies with very little historical connection, such as Persian Islamic Love Lyrics with the Latin Christian affective mystical tradition. These courses engage the ways in which Christian-Muslim borders create and imagine forth theological insights otherwise inaccessible without comparison or in isolation.

- Finally, the third set of classes are those that attend to how Christian-Muslim borders produced conflict and race-making ideologies and systems: we have to tell these histories so that we can undo the past and create a future, again, yet unknown.

In all these courses, we must recall that the structures and systems that racialize religion in our contemporary world demand that we attend not only to Islamic theology in classical and post-classical texts, but also to the lived experiences of communities of Muslims worldwide. Christian discourse has racialized religion; it is our task now to undo that process and renew the present so that we may create a future with eschatological hope, not merely utopian politics.

In addition to coursework, we must religiously diversify our departments. Catholics in the United States were once strangers in a foreign land, and it is our responsibility to use our relative economic and political power to make space for non-Christian scholars in our departments.

Finally, we need to think Catholic interreligiously beyond the undergraduate and graduate classroom and into our seminaries. We can follow the lead of some our Protestant siblings and their seminaries and incorporate some required courses in interreligious studies and comparative theology in the intellectual and spiritual formation of Catholic priests. These priests will become pastors at parishes whose members are increasingly becoming indoctrinated not by Catholic social teaching, but by social media, not by Catholic theology, but by ideologies of misinformation, disinformation, and yes, of white and Christian supremacist hate. Seminarians need to be trained to address this with interreligious and intercultural intelligence and proficiency. Indeed, supersessionist language continues to lurk around every corner, despite Vatican II's explicit rejection of it; even Pope Francis was susceptible to supersessionist language in a homily he delivered last August.[15] It is only a small step from Christian supersessionist language to white supremacy, and its corollary, the right-wing "great replacement theory" a conspiracy theory "that states that nonwhite individuals are being brought into the United States and other Western countries to 'replace' white voters to achieve a political agenda. It is often touted by anti-immigration groups, white supremacists and others, according to the National

[15] Francis, *General Audience* (August 11, 2021), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2021/documents/papa-francesco_20210811_udienza-generale.html

Immigration Forum,"[16] and, I might add, by Fox News' Tucker Carlson himself, whose show was the number one rated cable news show in 2021—highly watched by white Catholics.[17] And I need not remind this audience that the anti-Black, racist attack in Buffalo was in part motived by this conspiracy theory.

The point of all this: Thinking Catholic interreligiously needs to attend to both the spiritual and the political—and seminarians must be educated in this interreligious history and theology so that they have the tools to be effective pastors in an increasingly polarized world. We must remember that *the theologies of the past remain the politics of the present; and so, the theologies of the present can create the politics of the future*.

Finally, let me end by recalling Amir's story. He came to LMU in 2005, "a refugee from the California State University system, and its then chancellor who proudly proclaimed that the role of the CSU was to 'create educated workers for the California workforce.'" Amir was more interested in creating educated citizens for the world, and so a Catholic university rooted in the liberal arts appealed to him

Indeed, as a contingent faculty member myself, living in contractual precarity from year to year at an academic institution—like many in the United States—crushed under the weight of neoliberal logic and market metrics, I often wonder how much longer this will be the case. But if Catholic institutions abandon their missions—missions which in some degree or another effectively aim to educate for beauty, truth, goodness, and justice, and to do so with interreligious and intercultural aims—I fear the worst. It is the responsibility of Catholic institutions to put your money where your mouth is, or put your budgets where your university missions are, and maintain the liberal arts and humanities, particularly the study of religion and theology, and to do so interreligiously. Otherwise, I wouldn't be standing here today. Without those nine required courses in theology, philosophy, and history, I'd likely be coding for Amazon, perhaps perfecting surveillance systems that the government and corporations use to track Muslims and immigrants, or Facebook, fine-tuning algorithms that further polarize us, or for Raytheon or Lockheed Martin, improving guidance systems on drones targeting Yemeni, Muslim children. I would have never added my theology degree, at SLU nearly 20 years ago; I would never have been given the justice-oriented critical thinking skills to resist structures and ideologies of oppression and create structures and theologies of liberation—interreligiously and with Muslims. So, let's continue to work *ad majorem dei gloriam*—for the greater glory of God—but let's do so interreligiously. Thank you.

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[16] Dustin Jones, "What is the 'great replacement' and how is it tied to the Buffalo shooting suspect?," *NPR News*, May 16, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/05/16/1099034094/what-is-the-great-replacement-theory.

[17] For an analysis of Tucker Carlson's show in this respect, see the *New York Times* interactive presentation of their research (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/04/30/us/tucker-carlson-tonight.html). See also Philip Bump, "Tucker Carlson plays dumb on 'replacement theory' — then espouses it," *Washington Post*, May 18, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/18/tucker-carlson-plays-dumb-replacement-theory-and-then-espouses-it/, and Nicholas Confessore and Karen Yourish, "A Fringe Conspiracy Theory, Fostered Online, Is Refashioned by the G.O.P.", *New York Times*, May 15, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/15/us/replacement-theory-shooting-tucker-carlson.html.

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