

Article

Rethinking the Intercultural Potential of Religious Education in Public Schools: Contributions from Intercultural Theology

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Abstract: This paper asks how intercultural theology can inspire a critical and constructive reflection on the intercultural potential of non-confessional religious education (RE). Taking the Norwegian non-confessional RE subject as a starting point, the paper draws attention to the tendency to present religions, worldviews, and denominations as single entities with distinct characteristics. As emphasized by Jackson, Jones and Meyer, and others, a systemic-oriented approach will largely capture the institutionalized sides of religion. Consequently, in schools, the intercultural dimension of RE can easily be reduced by emphasizing students' need for encyclopedic knowledge about different traditions, overlooking how religion is embedded in social life and transforms, develops, and interconnects through everyday practices outside of institutionalized religious life. This line of argument sets the stage for the next part, examining how intercultural theology can create critical awareness of the inner diversity and interconnectedness of denominations and religious traditions. The paper argues that the descriptive and normative framework of intercultural theology can inspire educators to reflect critically on the intercultural dimension of a non-confessional RE.

Keywords: religious education; intercultural theology; intercultural education; classification of religions and denominations



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1. Introduction

In this article, I reflect upon how intercultural theology can provide a critical and constructive foundation for reflecting on the intercultural dimension of the non-confessional study of religions and worldviews in public schools. Interpreting intercultural theology as an in-between theology that addresses the oscillation between the particular and the universal (Gruber 2018; Wrogemann 2021), I ask how attention toward context and cross-boundary relations may critically challenge a common world religion-oriented didactic within the subject of religious education (RE) (see, e.g., Anker 2017; Enstedt 2020; Jackson 2014; Skeie 2009). When the teaching of RE relies on a classification system rooted in Western Protestant Christianity, which presents faith traditions as homogenous and unchanging over time, the intercultural potential of the subject can easily be reduced. The need for rethinking the intercultural dimension of non-confessional RE would thus mean counteracting the removal of religion from context and distancing faith traditions from lived experience. As such, the article at hand proposes a reflection on how insights from intercultural theology can provide a critical and constructive voice for enabling non-confessional RE in public schools to contribute to students' intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

By framing intercultural theology as an in-between theology, Wrogemann (2021) identified a theology that reflects not only the “emergence of new culturally contextually local varieties of Christianity” (p. 8) but also “processes of constructive boundary work over against other religions and worldviews with their competing truth claims, values, and practices” (p. 9). From this perspective, intercultural theology helps us understand both the complexity of the continuously ongoing contextualization of the Christian universal message of salvation through Christ and the interrelations between the Christian faith

and other religions and worldviews. Intercultural theology draws attention toward the transformations that take place at the boundaries between religious communities. By turning to intercultural theology as an in-between theology, the paper aims to answer the following research question: What resources can be found in intercultural theology to enhance students' ability to interpret, relate, value, and interact with cultural differences through non-confessional RE in public schools?

The paper is structured as follows. First, I introduce the characteristics of non-confessional RE in public schools, highlighting the increased role of intercultural understanding that has been associated with the RE subject. Here, I use the Norwegian RE subject as an example, which illustrates the strong position that the world religion paradigm still has in the non-confessional study of religions in schools. Second, I draw attention to the tendency to introduce religions and other belief systems as single entities that reflect largely the institutionalized sides of religion. The danger is thus that the teaching of RE overlooks the fact that religions and worldviews are deeply embedded in social life and transform, develop, and interconnect through everyday practices outside of institutionalized religious life. As a consequence, the intercultural dimension of RE can be reduced to a question of how to provide students with facts and informational knowledge about the different belief systems. In doing so, there is a risk of distancing religion and worldviews from lived experiences. In the remainder of the article, I turn to the framework of intercultural theology, asking what resources can be found to create a critical awareness of the inner diversity and interconnectedness of denominations and religious traditions when teaching RE in public schools. It is worth noticing, however, that I do not engage with questions of how the field of intercultural theology relates to other ways of doing theology, for example the hermeneutical structure of contextual theologies. As such, the paper does not engage with questions of whether intercultural theology is, in fact, theology at all. My intention is rather to investigate how a reflexive approach to theological thinking that is aware of the fluidity and ambiguity of religious traditions can inspire a critical reflection on the intercultural dimension of non-confessional RE.

2. Non-Confessional, Intercultural RE

In recent years, the complex processes of globalization, internationalization, and immigration have continued to change the global landscape of education (May and Sleeter 2010; Wolff and Ehrström 2020). As a result, the increasingly diverse backgrounds of students have contributed to reshaping the conditions for learning in many classrooms, making cultural, linguistic, and religious plurality an integral part of the educational experience. For public schools bringing together a diverse body of students, a major task is thus to meet the needs of diverse learners by creating an inclusive and learning-friendly environment for all children and young people (Nieto 2017). In this way, public schools play an essential role as an arena for co-creating community. By affirming and recognizing the value of diversity in the classroom, teachers can contribute to the academic and social achievements of all students, resulting in the latter having a greater sense of belonging, more participation, and enhanced social cohesion.

For this reason, RE in schools has become an important tool for preparing students for intercultural interaction and collaboration. Both non-confessional and confessional approaches to RE have been faced with the challenge of increased globalization and pluralism, resulting in the need for a stronger emphasis on interdenominational and interreligious learning (Jackson 2014; Schreiner 2007). As can be seen, for example, in the work undertaken by the Council of Europe (2022) on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, RE education, regardless of model, has the potential to enhance students' understanding of worldviews and the beliefs of people that differ from their own and to enable students' competence to navigate and feel at home in a diverse society. In many countries, the subject of RE is thus closely associated with the ideals of intercultural dialogue, emphasizing opportunities for better understanding, transformation, and new insights.

An example of this is the non-confessional Norwegian RE subject, which has been highlighted by school authorities since its introduction in 1997 as a subject for intercultural understanding (Ministry of Education 2020). Although the RE subject has been often debated in the Norwegian context and met international critique for implicitly giving Christianity a privileged position within it, the latest changes have been more informed by religious studies perspectives than by Christian theology (Bråten 2015; Skeie 2022). These clarifications have favored didactical approaches whereby students learn about different religious and secular worldviews in a pluralistic and non-partial way, underlining that religions and beliefs should be introduced according to their own particular characteristics and with the same pedagogical principles (Skrefsrud 2022). Hence, composed as a common school subject, the Norwegian RE subject aims to give learners intercultural competence, enabling them to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support their ability to understand cultural complexity and to interact with people from different backgrounds (Ministry of Education 2020).

However, as noted by Skeie (2009, 2020), von der Lippe and Undheim (2017), and others, the world religion paradigm still has a surprisingly prominent position within the Norwegian RE subject. Based on the latest reform, the curriculum aims to counteract a one-dimensional world religion approach by emphasizing perspectives on contemporary religion and worldviews in favor of a historical and chronological presentation of religion (Skeie 2020). In addition, interdisciplinary themes were introduced to help students see the value of different perspectives for discussing complex issues, such as how religious worldviews can contribute to sustainable lifestyles. Nevertheless, the classification of religious communities, religious phenomena, and even secular worldviews into an orderly system seems to be persistent in both teaching and learning materials in the Norwegian context (Schjetne and Hansen 2021). Introducing the phenomena of religion to students in school, the ideal of bringing order, system, and intelligibility to the range of knowledge about religion and worldviews seems to be more important than introducing students to the complexity of religious practice and experiences.

As noted by Jackson (2014), Enstedt (2020), and others, the classification of religions and denominations for didactical reasons is not restricted to the Norwegian RE context. In many classrooms across Europe, the teaching of religion continues to follow a systemic-oriented approach, describing and comparing the various religions and denominations within them as single entities. Inspired by the influential work of Smart (1977, 1996) on the different dimensions of religions, a common approach to RE is thus to introduce students to the origins, historical developments, and common practices of the major world religions and their denominations. Through such an approach, students learn about the various world religions by highlighting their specific characteristics, common themes, similarities, and differences, examining the different ways in which the religions and specific directions within them interpret life and reality (see, e.g., Beyer 2015; Enstedt 2020; Nyangweso 2022).

Such a way of framing religion, however, has been critically questioned for several reasons. In his influential work on non-confessional RE, Jackson (1997, 2004, 2014) critiqued the tendency to conceptualize and reify religions into abstract systems of specific beliefs and practices. According to Jackson, such a conception of religion runs the risk of being one-dimensional, as it primarily draws attention to the institutionalized sides of faith traditions. A system-oriented understanding of religion thus tends to overlook how religious experiences and practices are embedded in social life and transform, develop, and interconnect through everyday practices outside of institutionalized religious life.

In Jackson's (2004) critique of essentialist readings of religion, the alternative is not to reduce religion to personal experiences or to promote a theory of religious relativity whereby the individual creates his or her own religious life world in isolation. Rather, Jackson (2004, 2014) argued that the most appropriate and realistic alternative would be to identify religious traditions and denominations as actual sociocultural realities. Embedded in different social and cultural contexts, religions are created and re-created in response to their surroundings.

An example of this is the contemporary context of ecological destruction that challenges faith communities “to ask what change religion can make to climatic and environmental change” (Bergmann 2015, p. 32). Within a scenario of rapid, widespread, and intensified climate change, Christian eco-oriented theology offers both an ecological critique of Christian theology and a theological critique of environmental destruction (Skrefsrud 2021). In turn, this makes it extremely difficult to argue for an essentialist and universal understanding of, for example, Christian identity, presupposing that the substance of the Christian church is unchangeable by nature and functions as an independent and self-referential system. For Jackson, it was thus imperative to imply a dynamic understanding of religion, exploring how religious traditions unfold, change, and interconnect in different social, cultural, and historical contexts.

The difficulty of classifying religions and denominations brings us to the concept of intercultural theology, which, in contrast to sharp classifications and border drawing, aims to explore what happens when borders become blurred. How can intercultural theology shed light on how we can consider the intercultural dimension of RE to help develop education that fosters democratic citizenship and enhances social cohesion?

3. Intercultural Theology: Some Insights

An important background to intercultural theology is provided by the fact that religious differences continue all too often to be a source of tension, conflict, and discrimination both between people from different beliefs systems, religious worldviews, and secular models of contemporary societies, and within different religions and denominations (Council of Europe 2006, 2022). As such, Jackson’s critical perspective on the conception of world religions can be said to correspond to the main characteristics of intercultural theology, emphasizing dialogues and interrelations between theological expressions from different parts of the global church. Built on the critique of a static and essentialist understanding of religious identity, intercultural theology acknowledges “the fundamental instability of identity: identity cannot be traced back to an unchangeable essence but is constituted only in and through discursive processes” (Gruber 2018, p. 10). Hence, within the framework of intercultural theology, “Christian identity is not simply given and static but must be renegotiated again and again” (Gruber 2018, p. 10). Intercultural theology is thus a theological reflection upon the process of interculturalization and the interconnectedness of cultures, undermining the idea of an “essence” of Christianity that is explicated in the tradition in different places and times (Gruber 2018).

Similarly, Wrogemann (2021) emphasized the Christian foundation of intercultural theology, relating the concept to the complex interplay of universality and particularity within and between the different Christian faith traditions:

Intercultural theology reflects the missionary/boundary-crossing interactions of the Christian witness of faith motivated by the claim to universal validity of its message of salvation. In the interplay between the respective cultural, religious, societal, and other contexts and actors, these interactions lead to the formation of multiple strands of local Christianities. Knowing that they belong together places before these strands the task of continually renegotiating normative contents of Christian doctrine and praxis in the tension between universality and particularity. (Wrogemann 2021, p. 3)

Hence, as we can see from Gruber’s (2018) and Wrogemann’s (2021) ways of framing the concept, intercultural theology has its origin in Christian thinking and aims to see the nuances of how the Gospel relates to the dynamics of different cultural contexts. Nevertheless, as noted in the introduction to this article, Wrogemann (2021) articulated an understanding of the framework of intercultural theology that reflects a broader scope beyond just highlighting the interconnectedness of Christian faiths or following the myriad footprints of Christian life and thinking around the globe. For Wrogemann (2021), intercultural theology refers to a variety of “processes of constructive boundary work” (p. 9), including an understanding of how people from different religions and worldviews

can find opportunities for cooperative, constructive, and positive interactions. Thus, according to [Wrogemann \(2021\)](#), applying intercultural theology would mean engaging in a cross-cultural as well as inter-cultural processes, which also implies seeking a deeper understanding of how religion is embedded in contemporary society. From this perspective, going beyond a specific “Christian” theological activity, intercultural theology draws attention to the intellectual and spiritual resources of people of different religious beliefs, how they interact, intersect, and diverge, and the role that the phenomena of religion can have in different contexts. Intercultural theology thus becomes a corrective to the tendency toward theological imperialism that has infected Christian affirmation for several centuries ([Waigi Ng’ang’a 2017](#)). As a concept, intercultural theology can also function as a counter voice against attempts to reduce the complexity of religion by detaching faith traditions from context and people’s lived experiences.

As such, intercultural theology emphasizes a dynamic understanding of religious identities and traditions. Within the perspective of intercultural theology, the construction of religious traditions can be seen as a result of what [Hervieu-Léger \(2000\)](#) called “a chain of memory” (p. 171), meaning that religious traditions exist in the dynamic transfer between individuals, binding groups of people together in the past, present, and future. Such a dynamic understanding thus challenges the conventional conception of tradition as beliefs, values, and practices that do not change, but remain the same from generation to generation.

According to [Hervieu-Léger \(2000\)](#), a conventional view on tradition and identity places these concepts in contrast to the fragmentation of modern identities; thus, as modern society becomes more complex, unstable, and fluid, the individual turns toward tradition to look for consistency. However, within such an understanding, religious traditions are reduced to a cultural memory of the past, which is an effective way of making religion irrelevant; thus, according to [Hervieu-Léger \(2000\)](#), “To say that religion has to do with tradition, namely with continuity and conformity, in a world dominated by pressure for change, effectively denies it any active social or cultural role in modern society” (p. 86). Hence, to avoid a static understanding of tradition as a nostalgic, exotic, and impertinent remembrance, the chains of memory, which in a modern society are more difficult to maintain as a living source of meaning, need to be rediscovered. Within the perspective of intercultural theology, religious traditions transform in the relocation between the generations and develop in a dialectic between continuity and change. [Bergmann \(2004\)](#) described such a dynamic as follows: “Something should remain the same, something should be left forever and something should be renewed and reconstructed in a new key. Something has to be invented” (p. 152).

To clarify the argument, within the discipline of intercultural theology, a dynamic understanding does not mean that religious traditions have lost their meaning or are no longer significant as systems with a particular content and specific practices. Religions, worldviews, and different denominations can certainly be described and identified, both with regard to their own characteristics and in contrast to each other. However, the concept of intercultural theology reminds us of the ongoing dialogue between and within different traditions and worldviews. Traditions are constantly evolving in processes of interexchange and transformation, which draws attention to the lived and concrete reality. As such, intercultural theology attends explicitly to the diverse groups of people who make up the various and complex religious traditions. Instead of seeing religion and worldview as abstract and disembodied ideas, intercultural theology moves toward the embodied practices of living in a diverse context.

4. Implications of Intercultural Theology for Non-Confessional RE

How can such an elaboration on intercultural theology inspire a critical and constructive reflection on the intercultural potential of non-confessional RE? As previously mentioned, scholars have for a long time critiqued a pedagogy that continues to view and present religious traditions as constructed systems largely disconnected from the ordinary

experiences of children and young people (see, e.g., [Anker 2017](#); [Enstedt 2020](#); [Jackson 2014](#); [Skeie 2009](#)). In an interconnected and complex world, however, such an approach is not sufficient. If the aim is to understand how religions and worldview make up the concrete lived reality of many people, and to develop students' skills and capacity for engaging with people of diverse backgrounds, lecturing on the traditions by using a more traditional approach toward world religions needs to be reconsidered.

First, I believe the framework of intercultural theology is an important reminder to myself and others working with prospective teachers in teacher education about what kind of competence teachers need within the field of religion when entering the classroom. From studies, we know that issues of diversity and social justice in teacher education are often concentrated on linguistic diversity ([Burner et al. 2018](#); [Strand and Hessel 2018](#)). [Strand and Hessel \(2018\)](#), for example, identified linguistic proficiency as the absolute key factor in educational achievement in a diverse classroom. While I would not dispute such an assertion, there is a risk within multicultural education and social justice education of viewing competence within multilingualism as the sole target, thereby overlooking other dimensions of diversity, including religious diversity (see also [Pfeiffer 2012](#)). Many teachers may thus feel that they are not well-equipped to engage deeply and fully with religious complexity and see it as beyond their area of academic expertise to make meaningful connections between religious diversity and other types of diversity.

For teacher education, the framework of intercultural theology provides a critical foundation for designing courses that may help student teachers to explore the interconnections between religious diversity and intercultural education. An issue to discuss and investigate would be, for example, what kind of values and emotions underlie the social commitment of religions or denominations. The practice of providing for the poor and meeting the basic and complex needs of communities, groups, families, and individuals has deep roots within the rich diversity of religious and secular world-view traditions ([Bergmann 2004](#); [Welsch 2017](#)). In this regard, it would be interesting to look at which traditional resources are called upon in working toward the improvement of people's lives, and how the different traditions give grounds for their empowering engagement with and for those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and experiencing exclusion for some reason and not able to fully participate in social, economic, and cultural life. Similarly, intercultural theology can stimulate teacher education courses that explore the conditions for inter- and trans-religious collaboration, the situations in which horizontal solidarity is called upon and emerges, and how social change and the empowerment of people and communities can be a result of such an interfaith engagement.

Second, and closely related to the first point, I see potential in intercultural theology for inspiring teacher educators and teachers to visualize the teaching of RE as more than conducting an academic exercise. Rather than reproducing a pedagogical approach in which students memorize facts and encyclopedic information about religious traditions, the discipline of intercultural theology can encourage more creative tasks and assignments inviting students to reflect upon the implications of religious complexity and diversity. This would help strengthen the links between schools and students' personal lives, attempting to position schools as a continuity to personal experiences and vice versa.

In an example of interfaith education, [Jones and Meyer \(2022\)](#) reported from a course organized around "memoirs and first-person narratives from a variety of religious and ethical traditions" and conducted with students in one of the boroughs of New York. Rather than lecturing about the various worldview traditions using a traditional world religions approach, the students were introduced to personal life stories about the role of religious beliefs and practices in everyday life. As noted by [Takacs \(2022\)](#), such a pedagogical approach would "move toward the embodied practice of living (justly, equitably) in a religious, culturally, and racially diverse world" (p. 2). As such, there is an applied dimension to an RE pedagogy inspired by intercultural theology. Pedagogies inspired by intercultural theology "attend explicitly to the concrete, lived reality of diverse communities;

religion is not an abstract, disembodied idea, but is only ever encountered embodied, emplaced, and enacted in the world" (Takacs 2022, pp. 2–3).

In the same example, the students were given the opportunity to explore the various topics of religious literacy, starting with personal narratives (Jones and Meyer 2022). In this way, students' understanding is constructed through an inductive reasoning. The process of learning begins with concrete learning experiences and continues with reflective observations, discussions, and finally abstract conceptualizations (see, e.g., Dodman et al. 2022). Specifically, personal narratives would function as an introduction to students' work on the history, origins, and beliefs of several of the religious traditions and how the traditions continue to be shaped and transformed by cultural and social contexts. The starting point in personal life stories can also open up students' further exploration of how religious faiths and worldviews relate to political, cultural, and social life across time and space. Critical to such a pedagogical approach would be the importance of understanding expressions and practices of faith in context. From the perspective of intercultural theology, students thus need to be conscious of the importance of the situation for shaping theology, and that religions and worldviews are closely interwoven into all dimensions of human experiences.

Third, and lastly, I shall draw attention to the skills and abilities that may follow from an intercultural theology-inspired study of religions and worldviews in public schools. When the teaching of RE helps students to see the tension between the universal and the particular, they are trained to be conscious of context, place, and identity and to see how a situated theology developed within a certain social and historical situation relates to other interpretations of faith. For example, working with the different ways of framing the mystery of salvation through Christ, students are given the opportunity to reflect upon both the contextual characteristics of theological interpretations and the relations between them. In addition, students are given a foundation for analyzing how lived experiences interconnect with religious practices and beliefs. By connecting the rich diversity of religions, denominations, and worldviews to lived reality, students are encouraged to see the significance and key functions that religion may have for people's everyday lives in contemporary society.

From this background, one can argue that when perspectives from intercultural theology are incorporated in RE, students are given the opportunity to develop the capacity to engage with people from diverse backgrounds in an open and trustful way. According to Nussbaum (1997), such capacities involve tolerance and respect, the ability to understand with depth and nuance, and emphatic listening, which she framed as being an intelligent reader of a person's story. As noted earlier in the article, within the framework of intercultural theology, human experiences cannot be understood correctly without grasping the diverse religious influences that shape the cultural context. For the teaching of RE in public schools, such insights would have the potential to enhance students' ability to establish connections and build relationships based on nuanced understandings that may combat religious stereotypes and misconceptions.

As emphasized by Vavrus (2010), a major goal for all subjects in an intercultural-oriented education is that students "come to realize that they are not outside of the history that unfolds in front of them" (p. 29). Hence, for Vavrus, as well as for scholars such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), Mayo (1999), and others, there is no such thing as a neutral process of education. School and education transmit the dominant culture and contribute to the reproduction of the power relations and hierarchies within society. It is therefore imperative that students develop a deepened understanding of their own positionality and of how cultural aspects and personal lived experiences engender them toward certain perspectives. Sieck (2017) framed such competence as "metacognitive capabilities" (p. 1), meaning that students come to discover how they are embedded in social practices themselves. Through such discovery, students can engage critically with reality and learn how to participate in transforming the often-hidden mechanisms that reinforce social inequalities. This competence is certainly not restricted to students but would also be

highly important to develop for student teachers. Hence, intercultural theology can inspire both school and teacher education to enhance a critical self-understanding.

Within the framework of intercultural theology, I see an important critique of a world religion approach in RE that distances the topic from lived experiences. As argued, I believe that such a way of framing the RE subject demonstrates a removal of scholarship from context. It constructs an understanding that religion can be studied as detached from human experiences and thus creates the illusion that knowledge exists independently and can be obtained through “objective” observations of the world. As such, intercultural theology reminds us that the production of knowledge demands a practice of positioning involving a self-critical awareness. Hence, in the framework of intercultural theology, there lies a challenge for RE in public schools to critically examine teaching and learning practices that reduce the variations of religions, worldviews, and denominations to simple categories for placing, labelling, and thereby controlling people. Without this critical perspective, it is easy to overlook the dynamics and inner diversities of beliefs and practices and instead construct a stereotypical description that fails to understand others’ ways of life.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have foregrounded the framework of intercultural theology to discuss its significance for non-confessional RE in public schools. My interest has been the question of how intercultural theology can support and inform a dynamic understanding of religious traditions in contrast to an essentialist and system-oriented reading. If we believe that religion is about more than abstract systems of beliefs, and that learning about religion in schools should also invite and integrate lived experiences, interreligious and interdenominational issues, the framework of intercultural theology can be a useful correction to existing practices.

While my starting point has been the Norwegian non-confessional RE subject, I believe that drawing on intercultural theology in a critical discussion on system-oriented approaches to RE would resonate with a variety of models for RE. In Europe, for example, the experience of RE is highly diverse, and different models are rooted in and shaped by specific complex situations. Nevertheless, as noted by [Schreiner \(2007\)](#), “all existing RE approaches are challenged by recent developments in society and in Europe” (p. 14). Hence, in many countries, confessional approaches to RE are also themselves seeking ways of responding appropriately to the increasingly pluralist reality. As such, reflecting upon the critical and constructive potential of intercultural theology is also relevant to the many examples of confessional RE being open to interreligious and interdenominational learning.

Analytically, the study of relations between intercultural theology and intercultural RE should not overlook the risk of intercultural theology itself becoming a political tool for programming RE in ways that extend power and domination. As noted by [Jackson \(2014\)](#), the expectations that European politicians and educational policy makers hold toward RE and its mediating role in schools may paradoxically reduce the subject to an instrument for solving existing problems of living together in complex societies. However, such problems and conflicts lie beyond the scope for school and RE to solve alone. Thus, to claim that intercultural theology is the only possible construct on the basis of which RE should be remodeled can lead to a new form of imperialism where one authoritative concept is replaced with another.

Against this background, it is important to underline that intercultural theology provides one of several opportunities to rethink intercultural RE. Future research should further examine how the framework of intercultural theology continues to challenge the subject of RE and how intercultural theology can be complemented with a wider range of perspectives and intercultural frameworks. As I have shown, the idea of intercultural theology itself can help us engage critically with such issues in a way that goes beyond a one-dimensional approach to RE.

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