

## Libraries Serving Dialogue

Odile Dupont, Editor. *Libraries Serving Dialogue = Les Bibliothèques au Service du Dialogue*. IFLA Publication 163. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter Saur, 2014. 174pp. \$113.99. Hardcover. 9783110316933.

*Libraries Serving Dialogue*, a volume from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), highlights the work of IFLA's Religions: Libraries and Dialogue (Relindial), which is a Special Interest Group dedicated to supporting information practitioners and "libraries serving as places of dialogue between cultures through a better knowledge of the various religions" throughout the world. The book includes twelve chapters, some written in English and some in French, documenting the various authors' experiences of libraries facilitating interreligious dialogue. Intended audiences of this resource include individual and institutional supporters of the interest group; formal members of IFLA interested in this subject matter more broadly; and information workers who engage with and are interested in theological and religious studies librarianship and would like to learn more about how peers and colleagues in IFLA engage globally with interreligious dialogue.

The volume begins with a short informational introduction about IFLA, which describes itself as "the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services" and "the global voice of the library and information profession" (vii). The first substantive essay in the volume outlines the genesis of Relindial, offering a deeper introduction to the group and orienting readers with the group's supporters, many of whom are introduced in the opening chapter. The chapter argues for the importance of convening international voices from religious studies and theological libraries in order to facilitate and support the stewardship of religious ideas and connections for patrons across cultural differences. This work is identified as being especially important in the twenty-first century, as religious conflicts throughout the world demand that librarians and institutions serve as conveners and distributors not only of knowledge and understanding of religion but also of diversity in representation and peaceful interactions. The remaining essays in the volume showcase how various institutions, collections, projects, experiences, and perspectives embody the values of interfaith and interreligious dialogue and connections the group prioritizes.

The strength of this book is the breadth of these essays, which present the authors' experiences engaging with projects at their respective institutions, facilitating interfaith dialogue with materials, and convening patrons in various contexts. The book sets out to show successful contributions of libraries to dialogue with cultures through the lens of religion. The IFLA Publications series seeks to interrogate how libraries, information organizations, and information professionals create personal and institutional goals and engage in global problem solving in the field while promoting and protecting their individual interests. The volume achieves these aims by showcasing a variety of library services the authors are involved in throughout the world, services that connect with religious studies and theological librarianship, or library initiatives of a religious nature. While each essay has its own style, in each, readers will find an abstract in both English and French, sections that provide rhythm to the ideas being presented, and a consistent tone of celebration for how a given library organization or work was created to be a space of interfaith dialogue and exchange. Some chapters include a clear conclusion; a bibliography for further research; and figures that help readers visualize the projects, collections, and initiatives that particular essay outlines.

A notable challenge is the language barrier many readers may encounter throughout the book. While each chapter includes an abstract in both English and French, the chapter's main body appears in a single language. The introductory *Note de redaction* ("editorial note"), as well as chapters four,

seven, and twelve, are written in French. Those who do not read French will find it challenging to follow the ideas presented in these chapters with the sole guidance of the English abstract. This challenge is especially clear at the end of the book, since the final chapter is written in French.

Conversely, those who read French but not English may struggle to engage with chapters written in English. While the inclusion of both French and English chapters may be an intentional appeal to IFLA's broad and international membership, to showcase a diversity of thought and knowledge or garner contributions from a wider variety of authors, the lack of continuity in language may pose a significant obstacle for readers to fully understand and appreciate the contents of this book. The book would benefit from a more robust introduction in English, not just in French, as well as a conclusion in both languages to tie together all of the themes and voices in the volume.

An introduction outlining each chapter's content would also help frame and anchor the main idea of the volume as readers work through each section. Since a different author writes each chapter to showcase a particular project, collection, or initiative unique to the author's context, an editor's consistent reminder to readers of a common thread would help reinforce and connect related ideas. Similarly, a conclusion at the end of the volume would help readers synthesize the various experiences from around the world as described in the volume. Without these, readers may need to go back to each abstract after reading through the entire volume, or even consult the back cover (in French and English), to be reminded of an anchoring main point. Furthermore, at times, the personal experiences of a given author's work distract from the objectivity and unified voice the volume aims to present. Of particular note is Noel Sheth's chapter, "The Role of Libraries in Peace Building through Interreligious Dialogue," which, at times, shares a disdainful and unproductive view of Christianity in comparing it to other religions, thus creating a distraction from one of the book's major points, which is to share with readers how librarians can promote positive cross-cultural exchanges through religion.

Despite these weaknesses, the book serves as a welcoming introduction to IFLA's Relindial Special Interest Group, and it offers an international set of perspectives for those interested in working with theological and religious studies librarianship. While the book is not necessarily a practitioner's guide, readers may find each author's individual experience of facilitating information initiatives might generate productive conversations around religion for patrons' engagement with library resources and programs. The book may help readers brainstorm appropriate ways to host interfaith connections within their contexts. Readers will also gain a historical understanding of how one international library organization has over the years facilitated and promoted interfaith dialogue with individuals and organizations. As such, readers will broaden their understanding of and connection to the ecosystem of theological and religious studies librarianship, and they may be inspired to engage with other library membership organizations in a similar fashion to localize such work in their own context.

*Libraries Serving Dialogue* provides an introduction to theological and religious studies librarianship projects of international scope that focus on facilitating interreligious knowledge production and exchange. If one is interested in this kind of documentation or would like to provide access for patrons to peruse such a record, I recommend purchasing an e-book version of this volume. The bilingual nature of the book, perhaps inaccessible to some, may prompt some libraries to look instead for articles or other volumes that cover similar topics. The book is also ten years old, and thus, another one of its values may be to inspire new research on the topic or prompt documentation of readers' own accomplishments to contribute more current perspectives on libraries as generative spaces of interfaith dialogue.

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