

## Book Review:

*Theology without walls: Founding essays. Denny, Christopher, and Rita D. Sherma, eds. Doylestown, PA: Caladium Publishing Company, LLC, 2025.*

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*Abstract: The second book in the Theology Without Walls series, this volume traces the last decade of developments in a conversation that seeks to generate wisdom across religious traditions. Theology with walls seeks to be a “cooperative, constructive, transreligious theological project” generating new knowledge and new understandings of extant knowledge in the field. Divided into three sections, the book lays out the conceptual groundwork for TWW through a series of short essays by a variety of theologians. Chaplains who engage in multifaith or interfaith programming may find answers and thought partners for the many questions that arise from deep engagement with traditions that are not one's own.*

Keywords: *theology without walls, philosophical theology, transreligious, interfaith, theology*

*Founding Essays*, the second in the ‘Theology Without Walls’ series, continues the intention of being a “cooperative, constructive, transreligious theological project” generating new knowledge and new understandings of extant knowledge in the field. (Denny and Sherma 2025, 2) Philosopher Jerry Martin, who initiated the project, states in his opening essay, “If the aim of theology is to understand ultimate reality as fully as possible and if evidence about, and insight into, that reality is not limited to a single tradition, what is needed then is a theology without confessional boundaries, a ‘theology without walls.’” (Martin 2025, 12) This volume traces the last decade of developments in the theology without walls (TWW). The collected essays explore what can be known if our sources are not structured by the limits of particular religions. Can we gain transreligious knowledge when the traditions themselves ask different questions, presuppose different cosmologies, and use wildly differing hermeneutics?

Divided into three sections, the book lays out the conceptual groundwork for TWW through a series of short essays by a variety of theologians. The initial section, “On the Concept of Theology without Walls More Broadly,” takes on the epistemological challenges of doing transreligious theology. The authors come to varying conclusions about the plausibility of the project while affirming the necessity and usefulness of trying. The second section, “Pluralism/Transreligious Theology –Possible and Inevitable,” seeks to map the conceptual and rhetorical space for doing theology in this way. And the final section, “On Issues of Belonging/Affiliation,” explores religious identity in light of a TWW orientation. These essays examine the meaning of “belonging” when the subject claims more than one religious tradition as “home.” Throughout all three sections of the book, authors return time and again to map out where TWW overlaps with comparative theology and interfaith engagement and where TWW expands beyond those categories.

The book is a lively thought companion to many of the questions that arise in the work of a multifaith chaplain. While written in the formal language of academic theology, the authors raise questions that sound familiar to any on-campus interfaith group: Can I learn about God from another's tradition? If I pull from multiple sources, am I creating a new religion? When does learning become cultural appropriation? How do we build upon common ethical or moral foundations when we can't even agree on the existence of an Ultimate Reality? Can I believe beyond the limits of my tradition, and if I do so, am I becoming someone or something different?

One perspective not yet included in this volume is that of those who generate knowledge from outside religious traditions. As I read, I wondered at the absence of non-religious or secular knowledge descriptions of transcendent experience and what that perspective might offer to this project. Although hinted at in Rory McEntee's essay, "Interspiritual Theology as a Radical Potential for New Vistas in Theological Thought" and a second short note in the "Afterword," the TWW movement has not yet found a way to integrate the wisdom of the Nones.

Whether or not you ultimately buy into the project of TWW, this book will push your thinking and offer clear articulations of the often-muddy arguments that surround these deep conversations. Standout essays by Peter Feldmeier, S. Mark Heim, Hans Gustafson, and Joyce Ann Konigsburg trace the limits, resources, and future orientation of the TWW project. The final "Afterword," by editor Christopher Denny responds to some of the big objections to the project, including whether TWW seeks to generate a new normative description of Ultimate Reality. I recommend the book for anyone seeking deep engagement with the promise and limitations of generating transreligious wisdom in the practice of higher education chaplaincy.

Elizabeth Hakken Candido is the College Chaplain and Director of Religious and Spiritual Life at Kalamazoo College, in Kalamazoo, MI. Her essays and short stories have appeared in a variety of publications including *Sojourners*, *Land Beyond Magazine*, and *Presbyterian Outlook*.