

5-1-2007

## Migrations and Unexpected Interreligious Dialogue

Orlando O. Espín  
*University of San Diego*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt>

Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Orlando O. Espín, "Migrations and Unexpected Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 12 (2007) 4-17.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology by an authorized editor of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

# Migrations and Unexpected Interreligious Dialogue

Orlando O. Espín

University of San Diego

The present article attempts to address, and take a first step in theologically unpacking the growing but often unnoticed inter-religious dialogue occurring among the world's "popular" religions.<sup>1</sup> Most Christian theologies of religions have directed their attention (considerable in the last forty years) to either laying the necessary theological groundwork for dialogue with the world's great non-Christian religions (Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, with an occasional bow to numerically smaller religions), or to a Christian theological evaluation of the world's religions.<sup>2</sup> However, these important contributions from Christian theologians of religions have sel-

---

<sup>1</sup>Nowhere in the present article is the adjective "popular" used, when referring to religion, as equivalent to "widespread" although it is evident that many of the world's religions are very much widespread. "Popular" is the adjective that corresponds to the noun "people," and I will be using the term only in this adjectival sense.

<sup>2</sup>There are some excellent Christian theologies of religions (among Catholics, especially *Nostra Aetate*). Examples from a vast bibliography include: R. Panikkar, *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); J. Bowker, *The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); D. Dawe and J. Carman, *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978); J. Hick and B. Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); R. Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); W.C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981); K. Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," in: K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. XV (New York: Seabury Press, 1979); idem., "Anonymous Christians," in: K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. VI (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969); idem., "Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church," in: K. Rahner, *Theological In-*

dom methodically analyzed the universe of the so-called “popular” religions – the actual religions of the vast majority of humankind. Much less have theologians wondered about the mutual impact that these “popular” religions might have on each other at the “popular” level. This article is an attempt at addressing these (absent) concerns, especially as they relate to the millions of women and men who im/migrate, and to the consequent “popular” inter-religious dialogue that very often follows human migrations. Here I build on some of my earlier reflections on culture, popular religion, and interculturality (references to these will be made in the footnotes).

## The Basic Argument

Religion plays a very important and critical role in the creation and definition of human cultures. But today’s human cultures are neither monolithic nor ethically naive – they are the contemporary results of historical struggles for dominance within the societies that created today’s cultures. The groups dominant today in societies won the struggles to culturally define their societies, but they have not erased the memories or presence of those groups that lost in that struggle. These other groups have preserved themselves and their memories

---

*vestigations*, vol. XII (New York: Seabury Press, 1974); L. Cencillo, *Mito: Semántica y realidad* (Madrid: Editorial BAC, 1970); H.R. Schlette, *Towards a Theology of Religions* (Montreal: Palm/Herder, 1965); J. Hick and P. Knitter, eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987); A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* ((Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982); H. Küng, J. van Ess, H. von Stietencron and H. Bechert, *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986); P. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985); idem., *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996); J. Gritti, *L'expression de la foi dans les cultures humaines* (Paris: Ed. du Centurion, 1975); L. Swindler, ed., *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987); J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); D. Cohn-Sherbok, ed. *World Religions and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992); and J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997 and 2001).

(and their alternative definitions of their society's culture), albeit if denounced by the dominant as "folkloric," "ignorant," or "subversive."

Religion too plays a very important and crucial role in shaping and defining the culture of these vanquished groups — giving birth to what we can refer to as "popular religion." By "popular religion" I understand a religious universe (i.e., a "religion") that is grounded in, expresses, and is expressed through, the culture (and hence also through the symbols, experiences, beliefs, etc., etc.) of common folk in society who, historically and still today are, unquestionably, the poor majority of humankind.<sup>3</sup> To understand the cultural means of expression in any society we further need to consider power, gender, linguistic, ethnic, racial, and class relations. "Popular religion" is not unrelated to "official religion" (i.e., the religion of the socially dominant) — "popular religion" could very well be understood as the common folk's version or expression of a common, originating or shared religious tradition (or root) that "official" religion represents in its own way as the result of its development within the dominant sectors of society, and which "popular" religion represents in its own way as the result of its development at the margins of society.

In today's context of globalization it is the vanquished groups which are more inclined to migrate, and thus it is the religions of the vanquished which accompany them and migrate as well, leading to an unprecedented and often unnoticed inter-religious dialogue, among the religions of the poor, which is arguably and profoundly transforming the worldviews and sense of human meaningfulness of large human groups in the world (besides significantly changing the popular religions themselves).

---

<sup>3</sup>For further reflection and references I refer the reader to the ample bibliographies on "popular religion," "popular Catholicism" and culture cited in my articles and books, more specifically in *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997); "An Exploration in the Theology of Grace and Sin," in: O. Espín and M. Díaz, eds. *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), and "Toward the Construction of an Intercultural Theology of Tradition," in *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 9:3 (2002) 22-59.

## Culture and Meaningfulness

Why should we even bother to consider popular religions? It often seems that their existence and roles are doomed in a globalized world. And yet, in spite of this and of many other forecasts of their early demise, popular religions are not only surviving but actually thriving (oftentimes there where more “official” religions seem to be losing their dominant grip or their appeal).

But before going on, let me quickly state my understanding of the meaning of the term “culture,” since I will be using this term throughout this article. I understand culture to be primarily the historically and ecologically possible means and ways through which a people construct and unveil themselves (to themselves, and only secondarily to others) as meaningfully human— and in the process construct and define (for themselves) what is “meaningfully human.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>It will become evident to most readers that my understanding of culture has been mainly shaped and informed, over the years, by four authors (and their respective schools of thought— not always at peace with each other): Antonio Gramsci, Peter Berger, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt and Pierre Bourdieu. I acknowledge, however, that they have not been the sole influences (Foucault, Jameson, Narayan, Ribeiro de Oliveira, Turner, etc.). I also admit that Gramsci, Berger, Fornet-Betancourt and Bourdieu might not always be in agreement with my conclusions. These four scholars are or were prolific writers, and thus only as examples, please see: Antonio Gramsci, *Literatura e vida nacional* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1978 [transl. of *Letteratura e vita nazionale*]); idem, *Concepção dialética da história* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1981 [transl. of *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*]); and idem, *Os intelectuais e a organização da cultura* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1979 [transl. of *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*]); Luciano Gruppi, *O conceito de hegemonia em Gramsci* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal, 1978); Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970); idem., *The Heretical Imperative* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980); idem., *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Kulturen zwischen Tradition und Innovation* (Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2001); idem., *Hacia una filosofía intercultural latinoamericana* (San José de Costa Rica: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, 1994); idem., *Interculturalidad y globalización* (Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2000); idem., *Culturas y poder. Interacción y asimetría entre las culturas en el contexto de la globalización* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2003); idem., *Aproximaciones a José Martí* (Frankfurt: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1998); idem., *Trans-*

The values, meanings and goals of cultures, which define the human communities that construct them, have effective incidence on the social organization of the contextual-material universes that these communities affirm as their own because they are in them. Even the most marginalized cultures are still meaningful vehicles of meaningful interpretations of life and reality for the communities that construct and claim them. And it is within, and from within, this meaningfulness that human communities create and speak their logic, their perspectives, their sense of life, and engage in the quest for truth. It is within and from within this meaningfulness too that human communities universalize their interpretive universes. True universality, thus, is not the decontextualization of thought or concepts (as globalization and modernity might lead some to believe) but the dialogue that engages the human communities' meaningful vehicles of meaningful interpretations of themselves and their worlds (i.e., their cultures), acknowledging each and every one of them as human and potentially relevant – thereby suggesting that there is a “human condition” which, although constructed and defined in and by every particular universality, can be effectively acknowledged as possessing universally relevant elements or description.

No culture is a monolithic block, as if a culture were the naive or simple development of a single tradition that grew without conflict or contradiction. Rather, every culture bears witness to an internal history of conflict and struggle for the determination and control of its values, meanings, logic and overall contour. The internal history of struggle for inner cultural hegemony is also part of the global intercultural dialogue, as each internal history remembers other silenced

---

*formación intercultural de la filosofía* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001); idem., *Problemas atuais da filosofia na Hispano-América* (São Leopoldo [Brazil]: Editora UNISINOS, 1993); idem., *A Teologia na história social e cultural da América Latina* (São Leopoldo [Brazil]: Editora UNISINOS, 1996); idem., *Questões de método para uma filosofia intercultural a partir da Ibero-América* (São Leopoldo [Brazil]: Editora UNISINOS, 1994); Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1980); idem., *Contre-feux* (Paris: Ed. Liber-Raisons d'Agir, 1998); idem., *Raisons pratiques* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1994); idem., *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1972); idem., *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); idem., *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

traditions and marginalized life experiences. Each and every human culture could have turned out differently, but if cultures exhibit their current values, meanings, logic, etc., it is because of the struggles for internal hegemony that they historically endured and which provided for the present outcomes. And religions, “ground” and products of cultures, are not exempt from also exhibiting today the results of their internal struggles for internal hegemony – the current shape of any religion suggesting the outcome of these historical struggles.

But as I mentioned, there are indeed certain traditions and perspectives that had to be either silenced or marginalized in order for cultures and religions to achieve their current dominant meanings and overall contours.

*Popular religions are understood best as the epistemologies of the poor, and less as the collections of their rituals and beliefs.*

---

The victors define culture in their image, and the vanquished are either silenced or relegated to the margins – and there, at the margins, the victors label the vanquished and their culture as “meaningless,” “ignorant,” “folkloric,” “outdated,” “irrelevant,” “superstitious,” or even “subversively dangerous.” The culture of the marginalized now ranks, in the categories of hegemony, as “subculture” at best. In any case, the vanquished are denied the possibility of defining the entire society’s culture in ways distinct from or unauthorized by the victors.

And yet it seems that this is but one part of the outcome of the struggles for cultural hegemony, because the vanquished (although marginalized) have not disappeared. Although silenced in the production and use of the language of the hegemonic domain, the marginalized can and do develop other languages, created as their own expressions of meaning and of humanness, no less public, but admittedly not dominant. These marginalized languages might be spoken in words, or their spoken words might not be allowed in the public arena.

And so these languages are more often expressed through song and lyrics, through all sorts of popular literature and graffiti, through visual forms, and (especially!) through religious forms and world-views which lie beyond the control or definition of the religious specialists acceptable to the victors, in other words, through “popular” religions.

Indeed, it has been shown that popular religions are understood best as the epistemologies of the poor, and less as the collections of their rituals and beliefs. And this is why, for the victors, much in popular religions seems (to them, of course) to be “wrong,” “superstitious,” “ignorant,” or “illogical.”

Having deprived the vanquished of their place as equals in the kitchen and at the table, the dominant are surprised that the poor can still find food ... which the dominant then do not hesitate to conveniently label as “lacking nutritional value” or as “bad tasting.” Popular religions are privileged ways through which the marginalized construct and establish their life meaning, beyond the control of the dominant. Or, using my earlier definition of culture, popular religions are historically and ecologically possible means and ways through which the marginalized construct and unveil themselves (to themselves, and only secondarily to others) as meaningfully human, and in the process construct and define (for themselves) what is “meaningfully human.”

## **Popular Religions as the Religions of Im/migrants**

What do popular religions and their role among the marginalized have to do with migrations? A great deal, because it is usually the marginalized of society who migrate. Those who are the dominant, the victors, rarely find themselves faced with the challenge and uprootedness of migration. The “losers,” the vanquished in the internal struggles of cultures and societies, are the ones who migrate – either because they are “pushed out” by the winners, or because they are given very difficult choices and shrinking spaces if they stay behind.

It might be reasonably argued that the “ultimate legitimation” for the decision to migrate, among the marginalized, is found precisely in and through their popular religions. And it might also be reasonably

argued that the “sustaining life meaning” among those who migrate – that which ultimately sustains and grounds them as humans – is also found in and through their popular religions. Considering that those who immigrate are often unwelcome, and are frequently regarded as “problems” or “threats,” the religions of migrating men and women play an enormously important epistemological and existential role among them.

Therefore, those scholars and those pastoral or social agents who must deal with im/migrants, in whatever way or circumstance, must also deal with the “ultimate legitimations” of the emigrants’ decision to migrate, and with the meaning of life that has carried and sustained them through their migration ordeal. This is not only a social question or a pastoral problem, but more fundamentally this is a matter concerning the very meaning and significance of life and survival for the marginalized peoples who make the choice to migrate (or who are pushed into it).<sup>5</sup> Dealing with the religions of im/migrants is not just a matter for the religious – it is a matter for any human being (believer and unbeliever alike) concerned with and about the life of migrating humans. It is really a question of the human rights of emigrants, and their right to construct and sustain their meaningful humanness in and through ways that might not please the dominant.

When discussing or studying the role of religions among emigrants we must, therefore, understand that the object of discussion or study is not coextensive with whatever “official” version the religion may have in a society. When discussing or studying religion among im/migrants we have to focus on “popular” religions, because these are culturally and historically the real religions of the vast majority of im/migrants.

---

<sup>5</sup>According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, on January 1, 2003, there were 20,556,781 refugees on earth. Of these 9,378,917 were in Asia; 4,403,921 were in Europe; 4,593,199 were in Africa; 1,061,199 were in North America; 1,050,288 were in Latin America and the Caribbean; and 69,206 were in Oceania. Please note that these figures refer to refugees only. Were we to factor in the number of documented and undocumented im/migrants across the world (who would not fit under the UNHCR definition of “refugee”) the total number of women and men in the migrating flows would need to be at least doubled!

I should specify that “popular” Catholicism, it need not surprise us, is the real popular religion of most of those who im/migrate from societies where, historically and culturally, western Catholicism has “successfully” helped define and shape ultimate meaning. It would be naive to assume that “popular” Catholicism is coextensive with “official” Catholicism, just as it would be unfounded to assume that these two are monolithic or mutually unrelated. Be that as it may, what I have been saying about the epistemological, cultural and existential importance of popular religions in general applies to popular Catholicism in particular when we refer to im/migrants within and from Latin American cultural contexts (and probably other contexts too).

### **Inter-Religious Exchange (as Intercultural Dialogue) as a Result of Migrations**

Given the realities of globalization, at a real-life “people level” it is popular religions that are sustaining and perhaps spreading the religious quest of humankind more successfully than the more traditional religions. I argue this for two main reasons.

First, the forces dominant in globalization do not support or want to support the spread of any one of the major religions, because tearing down barriers (including the religious barriers which doctrinal and ritual orthodoxies imply) is one of the key features of contemporary globalization. And, second, the dominant classes in today’s globalized world are not the ones more frequently motivated to migrate, thereby bringing their more traditional religious universes with them elsewhere. On the contrary, the religious quest of the majority of humankind is being expressed and negotiated through popular religions, as these are the religious universes of those who often face the difficult experience of migration. Therefore, given the migration of millions of men and women every year, it seems reasonable to argue that popular religions (and not the more so-called “mainstream,” major religions) are moving and spreading, often beyond the control or notice of the powers dominant in globalization, and providing the religious legitimations and explanations which sustain the life of the majority of humans.

Popular religions are engaged in what could be described as an inter-religious and intercultural dialogue of unprecedented and unforeseen consequences for the religious future of humankind. This dialogue seems to result today from the (forced or chosen) mobility of millions of marginalized persons across the world – a mobility often provoked by the dynamics of globalization.

In manners similar to the cultural “flows” described by Robert Schreiter, symbols, doctrines, rituals and worldviews “birthed” in and by popular religions are today crossing the world as part of migratory currents, “seeding” different contexts and spreading new ideas, explanations and expectations. Old religious forms are renewed with new perspectives and in new contexts, so that what might have been created in Lima or Cochabamba, for example, might today reinvent itself in Seattle or Buenos Aires, what was common in Port-au-Prince or Delhi might now be commonplace in New York or Johannesburg, what was practiced in Rabat or Guanajuato now appears in Madrid or Miami, and what was typical of Maputo or Kinshasa finds itself today reborn in São Paulo, Lisbon or Brussels. And I am not talking about the results of evangelization or of other intentional, missionary efforts of the major religions – I am referring to the unintentional and unforeseen dissemination and mutual seeding of the religious symbols, rituals, doctrines, hopes and worldviews of the poor, as fueled and made possible by the migrations of the poor in today’s world. The resulting mosaic might be decried as superstitious or ignorant by the representatives of the major religions, but none of their complaints seems capable of stopping this ever-increasing popular inter-religious dialogue.

What now exists religiously is often not identical to what was in the places of origin, and yet it is only partially detached from its original moorings. Latin American popular Catholicism, for example, remains clearly identifiable as such, and it has not become some sort of cafeteria-line of exotic beliefs and practices, and yet in the U.S. and Europe it has begun to incorporate forms and contents which were unknown in Latin America, thereby seeding this popular Catholicism in unexpected ways unexplainable except through migration.

What seems to be appearing in the world of popular religions might be described as a growing mosaic of ideas, explanations, sym-

bols and rituals, with some identifiable doctrinal or theological identity as selection criterion. But there is one overriding centripetal impulse that gathers and makes possible mutual seedings, exchanges and dialogue among the popular religions: usefulness.

This usefulness is not the cheap expectation frequently associated with magic. It is the hope of those who have little else. That they be heard by God is necessary and important but increasingly not enough – God also has to come through and help them find security, employment, housing, and healthcare. Globalization has by now taught them that the benefits they hear and dream about are not awaiting them only in an eternal paradise entered after death – but rather, the possibility of having a home, a job, healthcare, and education for the children is calling from the other side of a river, or of a sea, or of a mountain range, or of a wall. The eschatological is not lost, but its historical realization now is expected. I suspect that this usefulness, although there before in some fashion, is further being fueled today by globalization’s “de-territorializing” thrust and by its very post-modern inclination to relativize and break down barriers – while the very promoters of globalization build even higher protective walls around themselves.

Please don’t think of the popular religious mosaic that I have just mentioned as some sort of magical, syncretic, cafeteria-line of superstitions. As I said earlier, what I think we are really witnessing is an intercultural dialogue among the world’s migrating millions, in and through the universe of their popular religions, fueled by the latter’s impulse to usefulness. If popular religions are the religions of the marginalized of globalization, and if the marginalized are those most likely to migrate, then popular religions are the religions of the migrating millions. And just as migrations bring about transferences and “flows” of many types and contents across the world, they also make possible these exchanges, transferences, seedings and expansions among popular religions. And given the important role of religions in the shaping of human cultures, of human definitions of meaningfulness, it is no exaggeration to state that at the popular religious level some very significant truth claims are being made, exchanged and accepted, beyond the control or notice of the major religions’ orthodoxies.

As I have written elsewhere, it would be dangerous nonsense to assume, in today's globalized and globalizing world, that the truth claims of one religious or national group must be held to be "universally valid" just because this one group has (through its own cultural categories and assessment) discovered or affirmed something to be true. By "universal validity" I mean that a truth claim, from within a specific culture, is presented to and is possibly imposed on the potential recipients because the claim's birthing culture assumes its particular perspectives to be applicable to and correct for all other cultures. The claim to universal validity has usually accompanied the history of power and colonization, and has been all too frequently legitimized by these. Unless a group acknowledges to itself and others that there are indeed other claims to truth, just as evidently true within and through other equally legitimate cultural categories, the group's claims to universal validity may be regarded either as an indication of human hubris or as a violation of other people's right to cultural self-determination.

Only in intercultural dialogue, "contrasting" truth claims with one another, can there begin to appear what may be said to be a "universally relevant" truth claim. By "universal relevance" I mean that a truth claim may be offered, from within a specific culture or group, to others who may find the claim to be useful, suggestive, or even true, thereby opening for and within the recipients perspectives that had hitherto remained closed, confused or ignored. It might be possible to discover common threads and denominators among the truth claims with universal relevance, but the original claim does not present itself as necessarily applicable or correct for all possible recipients and in all possible cultural contexts. The recipients must consent to the relevance of the claim that is offered to them. Only in the "contrasting" intercultural dialogue necessary for the discovery of universally relevant claims can truth be acknowledged, and only then can truth unveil itself without the trappings of empire, imposition or idolatry. The possibility of "universal relevance" is the groundwork for what has often been called "inculturation" – although it might be more precise (and less colonizing!) to refer to it as "trans-culturation" or "inter-culturation."

I realize that the concern for relativism immediately comes to mind. How do we avoid relativism in such intercultural dialogue? And why should we be concerned for truth, when popular religions seem more inclined to seek the useful over the truthful?

It seems to me that there is no limitless relativism involved in an intercultural dialogue that leads to universally relevant truth claims because there is no limitless number of cultures or of cultural contexts or of truth claims or of popular religions. Furthermore, the fear of relativism is itself a culturally grounded (and culturally legitimized) fear; and a history of the cultural fear of relativism might unveil it as more intimately connected with power structures and concerns than we might care to admit – in other words, the cultural fear of relativism might be discovered to have less to do with truth itself and more to do with some groups' need to make "universal validity" claims, which have historically accompanied the exercise of dominant power.

It might be important to pluck our understanding of truth from the prison of concepts, seeking it instead in our "inter-comprehension" with others (i.e., with others' lives, with others' historical realities, and so on). It might be important to let others, and to let truth itself, be "un-defined" for us (within our own cultural perspective), letting their alterity communicate with us as alterity and, therefore, without necessarily cleanly "fitting" within our categories. This "in-definition" has nothing to do with relativism – on the contrary, it is the humble acceptance of our own cultural limitation and a critique to our own cultural inclination to intellectual self-idolatry. And fourth, it is also important to move our understandings of truth beyond the prison of concepts because (for believers) God is not a concept and yet God is truth – thereby allowing us to ground and better understand the claim that truth is and must be done and lived, or it risks becoming an empty or "useless" statement devoid of existential moorings.

The usefulness to which popular religions are inclined in today's globalized world is thus deeply rooted in the implicit but very real understanding of truth as orthopraxis – because that which is believed and claimed as true is that which is lived and experienced as useful in the quest for and affirmation of life and life's needs. And that which

is lived and experienced as useful in the quest for and affirmation of life and life's needs can be ascertained as such (i.e., as useful) by others – and thus ultimately be a universally relevant truth claim – precisely because others might find it useful too in their quest for and affirmation of their life and their life's needs.

## **By Way of Conclusion**

It seems to me, and I hope to have argued the point well here, that there is a growing but often undetected inter-religious dialogue going on among many of the world's "popular" religions. This fact by itself might not be of significant concern to most people were it not for another fact: religion (and "popular" religion is "religion") is a powerful player in the shaping of cultures and worldviews. Hence, the ongoing inter-religious dialogue described here is and will be impacting the identities, cultures and worldviews of very significant portions of humankind.

Finally, the religions of the migrating millions of poor women and men, in/from/to every continent, raise the question of ethics for theologians. And thus for me the most serious question: do we only or mainly address the theological questions raised in the context (and often for the clarity) of the dominant in our societies and Church, or do we as theologians attempt to address (with more than occasional interest, and certainly with all of the necessary scholarly rigor) the religions of the marginalized of this world?