Review

Henk Jochemson and Jan van der Stoep, editors,
Different Cultures, One World:
Dialogue between Christians and Muslims about Globalizing Technology
(Rozenberg Publishers, 2010). 159 pp.

Reviewed by Luisa Gandolfo

Interfaith dialogue has to date retained a focus on conflict prevention and the facilitation of cohesion. Retaining the essence of unity central to this discourse, *Different Cultures, One World* addresses the twin concepts of technology and ecology. Placing the valedictory address of Professor Egbert Schuurman, *The Challenge of Islam's Critique of Technology*, delivered at the Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR) in June 2008 at its crux, the volume

analyses Schuurman's 'garden model' in the context of globalizing technology. For Schuurman cultural development necessitates nurture and as a communal home within nature it is the obligation of humankind to ensure that technology, culture and nature bond to create a 'garden' that must be respected as a gift, since "[r]eality is given to us. [...] Just as we carefully unwrap a precious gift, we should treat the gift of God's earth with a sense of awe and gratitude. A change in attitude and behaviour is called for." (20). Through ten papers the authors engage contemporary secular thought on science and technology and discuss the approach of humankind towards issues of finance, fuel, security and food, and conjecture the role of religious traditions in imparting a practical awareness absent from the secular rhetoric.

The founder of the garden model opens the debate with the understanding that "technology and the technological world picture are not the same" (17) for the world picture, with a focus on functionality, rationality and universality lacks ultimately, reality. The result is a "destructive influence [on] nature, from ecosystems to the biosphere, as well as society and the social environment" (17). While the intention of the publication is to foster interfaith dialogue, Chapter Three, 'Towards a cultural dialogue between Christian and Islamic scholars,' predominantly focuses on the ecological impact of the technological world picture. Schuurman succeeds however, in establishing the foundation for the theories that follow, as Bünyamin Duran demonstrates through his analysis of Schuurman's garden model via a critical theory framework comprising the works of Max Weber, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Jürgen Habermas. Duran works from the point of secularization and technology with a view to establish the positive and negative consequences for human beings and nature and the incorporation of the ideologies of Muslim thinker Bediuzzaman Said Nursi serves to further ameliorate the discourse. Central to the paper is the call for a transformation in the attitude of humankind, one that will "change the current materialistic culture into a new culture marked by universal solidarity and brotherhood and a loving relation with nature" (34); a worthy cause, it is

nonetheless tempered by the pragmatism of Nursi's approach: "We shall wage *jihad* with the weapons of science and industry against the most dangerous enemies of Upholding the Word of God, which are ignorance, poverty and polarization" (32).[1] Thus, while Duran's narrative bears Utopian nuances, Nursi affords practicality through faith and the implementation of technologically-based change.

From the pacifistic to the volatile, James Clement van Pelt explores themes of *jihad*, technological deification, limitlessness and the anthropocene epoch through Chapter Four, 'On the brink of the volcano: Convergence, ephemeralization and the telos of technology.' van Pelt sustains the refrain of optimism – "The only alternative that can bring a solution will be to stop hating and to love" (43) – though the chapter fails to elaborate on elementary points of contention. Identifying 'jihadist terrorists' as "harder to neutralize or even to identify than those who identify themselves publicly as 'Jihadists'" (42), the author omits to differentiate or clarify the 'jihadists', thereby applying it as a solely negative term, regardless of the 'terrorist' suffix. Moreover, while van Pelt urges a cessation in hate and domination and a furtherance of love and service, he does not acknowledge the role of technology as a source of education. Technology could assume a positive and substantial role in interfaith dialogue and the proliferation of ecological awareness, yet its potential passes sans comment. Nevertheless, the chapter excels in the analysis of the anthropocene epoch and van Pelt's appraisal is a poignant one: "At present, 'Anthropocene' has a shameful definition: the fleeting epoch during which the intelligence of one species perpetrates the Earth's sixth mass extinction while extinguishing its own culture" (p. 46). The solution, he reasons, resides in the realization that self-preservation is synonymous with the moral imperative, while it remains possible to salvage the anthropocene epoch from its 'shameful definition' and reconstruct it as a noble, redemptive period.

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[1] Nursi, B. S. (1960) *Divan-i Harb-i Örfî*, Istanbul: Yeni Asya, p. 66.

Christianity emerges to the fore through Chapters Five and Six, 'Structures for an imperfect life: the development of 'evil-proof' technologies' by Marc J. de Vries and 'Against the Promethean presumption: A Roman Catholic assessment of technology' by René P. H. Munnik, respectively. de Vries demonstrates how the critique by phenomenologists and neo-Marxists founders, while emphasizing the pertinence of Christianity in the promotion of modesty that would facilitate Schuurman's garden model, as opposed to than hinder it. Likewise, Munnik contends that technological developments are positive, though a degree of pragmatism must be applied, particularly in the perception of perfection. Munnik's discourse on the theological notion of God and perfection is engaging and contextualized; nevertheless, the omission of the Islamic perspective on the issue is conspicuous, since there is a distinct semblance to be drawn.

It is in Chapter Eight, 'Heavenly guidance for earthly problems: A vision of a transformation from the machine to the garden model' by Abdul Majid and Fazli Karim, that the essence of Schuurman's garden model is realized in full. As Majid and Karim observe, "The 'garden model' fits perfectly within both the Christian and the Islamic paradigm. Both seem to concur with the confession, "we love all creation because of the Creator" (89). Thus, the authors seamlessly juxtapose Islamic and Christian approaches to the preservation of the environment with a nod to the significance of technology in the endeavour. Similarly, Emin Akcahuseyin meticulously demonstrates the ethical aspects of technology vis-a-vis human values in an Islamic context through Chapter 10, 'Technology and human values: An Islamic perspective.' Drawing on the works of Bjørn Hofmann, Langdon Winner and Necati Aydin, Akcahuseyin concludes that Islam is in harmony with scientific thought, supports technological advances and advocates that Muslim scientists and engineers should welcome technology with a balanced approach that will render technology "more human."

The ethos of *Different Cultures, One World* resides in its search for a sustainable and theologically cohesive approach to the betterment of society and the environment as a whole.

The editors have gathered a range of papers and approaches, and while certain chapters resonate with greater relevance, the overall result is a publication that comprehensively depicts the perceptions of technology and the environment within a Christian and Islamic dialectic. Nevertheless, with few exceptions, a schism remains as a number of papers focus on the Christian context with little or no acknowledgement of the Islamic perspective. This is particularly lacking in instances wherein a comparison could be drawn; since dialogue requires two parties, the inability to engage with one's equal renders it but a one-sided glimpse of a theo-technological debate. Despite this shortfall, the chapters in which the authors succeed in merging the two enable the study to emerge as an engaging and timely review of the garden model and interfaith dialogue in a technological context.