

## Book Reviews

*Fostering Interreligious Encounters in Pluralist Societies: Hospitality and Friendship.* By SimonMary Asele A. Ahiokhai. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. xiii + 239 pages. \$89.99.  
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In this multidimensional work, SimonMary Ahiokhai demonstrates well the positive contributions that sound ethnographic research can provide in helping one to rethink and reapply classic motifs in interreligious encounters. Although perhaps obvious, it nevertheless remains important to note that such encounters entail not just a meeting of religions, but a meeting of persons. Theories and models require concretizing in order to assess their accuracy and efficacy, and Ahiokhai carries this effort further by localizing his project in the religiously plural context of Ihievbe, Nigeria, where Christianity meets Islam and Ihievbe traditional religion. This confluence of traditions creates a space to examine hospitality and friendship as practiced by the townspeople and as presented in philosophy and theology. The result is a call not just for more friendly and hospitable encounters among religious communities, but to examine theology and practice in light of the actual experiences of persons living in religiously plural places.

Ahiokhai begins with a short history of Ihievbe town and concludes with an ethnographic study of the Christian, Muslim, and traditionalist communities therein. The trajectory of his argument develops through an assessment of classic and modern philosophical and theological conceptions of hospitality and friendship via this context. For hospitality, these include Descartes, Husserl, Heidegger, Marion, Buber, and Levinas. Theologically, the relation among persons in the Trinity and the hypostatic union provide models for hospitality. Alterity, trust, and vulnerability become the hallmarks of authentic hospitality in the encounter between guest and host. Concluding with a turn toward prayer and ritual focusing on interreligious practices where Roman Catholics play host, he argues, “only when the religious other has a legitimate place and role in our worship rituals can praying together be authentic and transformative” (79).

In the section on friendship, Aristotle, Seneca, Aquinas, Nietzsche, and Moltmann join the conversation. The inclusion of Moltmann allows for a nice Christological pivot that turns to Jesus' ministry as a model for inclusive friendship and balances the higher Christology of the previous section with a lower, practical focus. An excursus on the kola nut-breaking ritual within Ihievbe traditional religion offers a model for an inclusive, pragmatic practice rooted in the local context. Ahiokhai argues for the need to identify such shared cultural elements, which do not require interreligious encounters to pursue the lowest common denominator across traditions but rather build upon those "cultural and/or religious qualities" that "either cut across cultures present in the community or which have been created in a hybridized way" and which already "hold a pluralistic society together" (125).

Toward the end of his work, Ahiokhai presents the Roman Catholic Church's approach to interreligious dialogue as being like a pendulum, which swings between "encountering the religious other" and "upholding the primacy of Christianity" (142). His critique of the dominant theologies of religion, which rightfully acknowledges the post-Vatican II swing back toward Christian primacy, helpfully demonstrates what others critical of these paradigms have argued for some time: they fail to attend to the reality of the religious other in their concreteness and so fail to offer authentic encounter in their inability to offer authentic hospitality and friendship. Ahiokhai's efforts to ground his approach in ethnographic work helps show the strategies and implicit theologies real folks in real situations apply as they make sense of themselves and others in a religiously plural context. Rather than a trickling down, he argues for a bubbling up.

Overall, the work is strongest when its focus is tightest. At times it can veer off on tangents that were undoubtedly helpful in the development of the argument, but perhaps need not be reproduced for the reader. Sections on Islam remain underdeveloped in comparison to the treatment Roman Catholicism and Ihievbe traditional religion enjoy. Nevertheless, there is much to commend in this study, especially in its ethnographic turn. Given hospitality and friendship have long been motifs for thinking about interreligious encounter, this work certainly will be of interest to scholars in this area, especially as it seeks to address a lacuna in the field via fieldwork. Ahiokhai breaks through what can often be a general or individual treatment of these questions by presenting a communal context. As the pendulum appears now to be swinging back by way of the magisterial watchword "encounter," Ahiokhai's work models well an approach that attends to both the local and global.

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