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Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, World Christianity Encounters World Religions. A Summa of Interfaith Dialogue

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EDMUND KEE-FOOK CHIA,
WORLD CHRISTIANITY ENCOUNTERS WORLD RELIGIONS.
A SUMMA OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE.
COLLEGEVILLE: LITURGICAL PRESS, 2018. 252 PP. (PBK).
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Interfaith dialogue includes all forms of positive encounters and relationships between persons of different faith experiences. Those involved share and witness from their own religious identity. Such dialogue enhances understandings of reality and the pursuit of truth about religion and life in general (52). The author discusses the four forms of interfaith dialogue, as well as strategies for enhancing it. The book has three parts: Christianity, Religion, and Dialogue; Scripture and Tradition; and Theologies and Praxes.

The Christian tradition was never a monolithic tradition, always had many centers. In 1900 more than 82% of Christians lived in the global North; by 2010, about 61% resided in the global South. “Global Christianity” (term coined early 20th century) refers to how the Christian faith of Europe expanded through the globe; “World Christianity” refers to the diverse forms of Christianity, with each “home” producing its own brand of Christianity (23). Transcultural and international religions, usually classified as “World Religions” are: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism; Confucianism and Taoism (42). Varieties of indigenous or tribal religions are usually not included—hence the lack of mention of African Traditional Religion, for example.

The Christian Bible, both Old and New Testaments, contain exclusive and inclusive points of view, particularity and universality. Texts like Acts 4:12, “There is salvation in no one else . . .,” are to be understood as “love proclamations” internal to the Christian dispensation. Used outside of Christian circles “they are not only meaningless but also dangerous, especially if used to pass judgments on those who are not Christians” (85). Asian Christianity, a minority amidst vibrant Asian religions that antedate Christianity, has been on the forefront of interfaith dialogue with its triple dialogue: dialogue with the cultures of Asia, dialogue with the religions of Asia, and dialogue with the poor of Asia. Seeing that other religions are part of God’s design for salvation, Christians have to engage with them as a fundamental element of the mission of the church. Hence, both dialogue and proclamation are integral to the church’s mission of evangelization (147).

Part 3, “Theologies and Praxes,” is replete with insights and challenges. Eight contemporary theologies of religious pluralism are profiled: Raimon Panikkar, Paul Knitter, John Hick, Peter Phan, Kwok Pui-Lan, Michael Amaladoss, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Aloysius Pieris. Pannikkar portrays internal intrareligious dialogue in his statement, “I ‘left’ as a Christian, I ‘found’ myself a Hindu, and I ‘return’ a Buddhist, without having ceased to be Christian” (173). “Interfaith Reasoning, Hermeneutics, Theology, and Worship” (191–206) is challenging. The group for Scriptural Reasoning, formed in 1995, study religious texts together without seeking consensus or a common ground, rather greater understanding of how each tradition interprets a particular life or religious theme. Dogmatic attitudes about the truth of one’s own religion or religious scriptures are proscribed. The Bible is read with the other native scriptures of Asia. The question is, why should Asian Christians not supplant the Old Testament with their own

scriptures as preparatory to the revelation of the New Testament. Comparative theology (different from comparative religious studies) ventures to learn from one or more faith traditions about faith, truth, sin, grace, salvation, community, and worship. In *interfaith worship* one participates in the rituals of a tradition different from one's own; in *multi-faith worship*, different faith communities are together but praying mainly on their own. "Christian-Muslim Dialogue of Theology" (207–223) confronts the Christian doctrine of original sin and redemption with Muslim faith. Muslims see God's revelation as embodied in the Qur'an, Christians as embodied in Jesus, the human face of God. Islam highlights God's graciousness and the goodness of the human person. God accepted the repentance of the first couple and children are born free of sin. It is blasphemous for the eternal God to die on the cross, unjust for an innocent man to die for the guilt of another, unworthy of God to abandon his prophet. Such dialogue makes Catholics emphasize that "original sin can be appreciated only if one has faith in the redemption brought about by Christ" (218). Further, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #404 has it, original sin is "contracted" not "committed," a state and not an act. The final chapter traces some challenges of religious pluralism, especially in theological education. Besides study of world religions and Christian theology of religions, one may envisage integrating interfaith learning and study of the world's religions into the entire course, even consider having the seminary itself as interfaith, seminarians of different religious traditions learning alongside one another.

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