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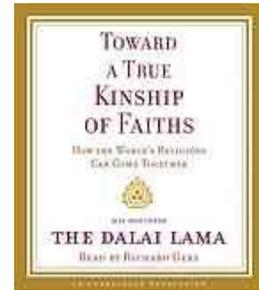
Book Review

Toward a True Kinship of Faiths: How the World's Religions Can Come Together

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

New York: Doubleday Religion, 2010

While many interfaith dialogues are planned and moderated by Christians, who invite other faith leaders to participate whether the gathering is Abrahamic faiths, Asian faiths, or interfaith, Christians are not the only ones who have initiated interfaith encounters. Over the past forty years, the Dalai Lama has been proactive with many faiths and religious leaders. He has authored *The Book of Joy* with Bishop Desmond Tutu¹ and has both written and advocated for the Charter for Compassion with Karen Armstrong. *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths* describes his journey with monks and religious leaders of various faith traditions; he then moves into the dialogue and collaboration with different religions towards peace in the world.



In the first chapters of the book, the Dalai Lama operates from what Paul Knitter describes as an inclusive position, where one understands another faith by comparing its practices and theology with one's own religion.² This journey begins as he leaves Tibet and settles in Dharamsala; in India many faiths interact with one another as neighbours, within families, and through political and social discussions.

When Thomas Merton comes to Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama sees the similarities between his tradition with its monastic rules and Christian faith with its orders of monks. These similarities include not only practices of prayer and meditation, especially time alone to contemplate, but also the daily routines and work within the monastery. Thomas Merton becomes a friend and the Dalai Lama yearns for further conversations. Unfortunately Merton dies in Thailand soon after; the Dalai Lama grieves the lost opportunity for more conversations and deeper friendship. This experience leads to a hunger for more interfaith experiences and conversations as he strives to get to deeper levels of faith.

His location in India gives him ample opportunity to meet with other religious leaders as well as to attend their ceremonies, festivals, and times of prayer and meditation. He enlarges his own spiritual vision by participating as fully as possible with Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Muslims. He speaks of these encounters through inclusion and begins moving towards Knitter's idea of pluralism, where the faiths intersect and enhance one another into a more universal vision. Yet he realizes that he is coming from a nontheistic perspective while others are theistic. This third step opens him to Knitter's postmodern/acceptance position, where dialogue and relationships continue and deepen but participants realize the significant differences between their faiths. The gulf between a theistic and a nontheistic faith is great, but conversations and dialogue can be very fruitful and mutually beneficial.

¹ New York: Avery, 2016.

² Paul Knitter, *Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).

There are many reasons for dialogue and encounter. The Dalai Lama would agree with Hans Küng that there will not be peace in the world until there is peace among all the religions. Therefore, the Dalai Lama works to create discussion with leaders and participate in ceremonies and other activities wherever he travels.

He undertakes his journey to world peace initially with other Asian faiths, but he then gives major attention to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, which are further from Buddhism in theology and structure. He primarily joins these faiths at the mystical level, but while mysticism is his entrance into the faith, it expands as he journeys and befriends other leaders. Knitter thinks of mysticism as a bridge to connecting with others. Even though they are practised and experienced differently, people can talk about prayer, meditation, and contemplation and learn from one another. This initial conversation can then lead to other aspects of the faith where there are more distinctions.

Pope John Paul II's interfaith gathering and celebration at Assisi in 1986, and his encounters with the Pope there, were deeply meaningful for the Dalai Lama. He saw how all the world's faiths can come together to bring peace and harmony with good rapport and kindness towards one another on this occasion.

At the end of the book, he encourages the religions to come together in a spirit of pluralism and then to engage with secularism and humanism: "Once you embrace the spirit of pluralism, combined with the ethics of compassion, there is no reason to reject the common humanity of those who affirm a secular way of life ... What matters is how we live our lives and the challenges we jointly face." As a nontheistic faith leader, he is an excellent mediator to bridge the gap with these traditions and then bring everyone together.

In *One Earth Many Religions*,³ Paul Knitter urges peoples of many faiths to work together towards justice and liberation, towards ecology and care of the earth, and towards being responsible for one another. These can be goals for secularists and humanists as well. Knitter would talk about these goals as working together on the ethical and practical bridge.

Both the Dalai Lama and Paul Knitter recognize the suffering that is in the world; it is important that all respond to the suffering of the other, so that suffering will be lessened. Unfortunately suffering will never disappear. Therefore, it is necessary to practise compassion and to find deeper and more meaningful levels of compassion towards others. It is important to note that Knitter and the Dalai Lama are arguing for compassion not only towards humans but also towards the earth and all living things. This can unite us, even as we continue to practise our own faiths.

Toward a True Kinship of Faiths is an excellent account of an autobiographical journey into interfaith relationships and theology. As he moves among other faiths, Buddhism remains his grounding. Yet he expands his consciousness and compassion as he befriends others and learns from them both in dialogue and prayerful practices.

Much of my reading about interfaith dialogue has been from Christian theologians who have shaped the nature of the dialogue; Paul Knitter is a foremost authority. *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths* is an equally helpful and interesting text for shaping dialogue and exploring compassion. Readers learn how to deal with diversity and dialogue of faiths as they walk alongside the Dalai Lama – a Buddhist leader – who explores how his tradition reaches

³ Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995.

out and finds open doors from others to explore how we create a world where there is more understanding, compassion, and action to work for justice, liberation, and ecology.

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