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Interreligious Dialogue, edited by Kroeger

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INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE. Edited by James H. Kroeger, M.M.
Davao City: Mission Studies Institute, 1990. 103 pages.

This sourcebook presents the Catholic position on interfaith dialogue with the great religions of Asia over a twenty-five-year evolutionary period since Pope Paul VI established in 1964 the Secretariat for non-Christians now known as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). As the title suggests interreligious dialogue is the key to the Church's mission in Asia. Today dialogue is an indispensable mode in the Church's mission of evangelization.

What is the relevance and theological significance of this source book to the situation of the Church in the Philippines and to this interfaith issue? In 1979 the first International Mission Congress was held in Manila. This was an important event because it emphasized how Asia is not only a unique and active missionary force, but also that in this "new age of Mission," there is need to renew our understanding of the theory, method, and goal of mission. Most welcome is this collection of Church documents and theological studies on interreligious dialogue among Eastern religions, edited by a theology professor who has taught for two decades in the Philippines, and who most recently has been chosen Vicar General of the Maryknoll Fathers here.

This manual is a handy general reference for Catholic perspectives on interfaith dialogue, but is not meant to be read from cover to cover by the general lay reading public. It can serve as a textbook on Missiology or as a useful tool for Catholic theologians, pastors, religious educators, college teachers and students, and catechists. At the end of the collection in Ch. 8 (pp. 99-103) the editor provides a guide to reading the book and some study questions on each of the seven chapters. One therefore need only mention the topics of each chapter.

Chapter 1 is from the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians (PCID) concerning the attitude of the Church to other religions with added reflections on dialogue and mission. Chapter 2 and 6 are a lecture and an address by Cardinal Francis Arinze, President of the PCID; the former on Christian commitment to interfaith dialogue and the latter about interreligious initiatives e.g. between Islam and Christianity, to promote peace. Chapter 3 is an exposition of the teaching of Vatican II on World Religions by Neuner and Dupuis (two Jesuit scholars whose well known source book of Church documents has become the modern *Denziger*). Chapter 4 is the editor's own valuable contribution, namely, a collection of over forty statements of both Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II over the last twenty-five-year evolution of interreligious dialogue. Included are Pope Paul VI's address in Manila (1970), and John Paul II's address in Davao and Manila (1981). Both Popes vigorously promoted dialogue as a integral dimension of the Church's mission of wholistic evangelization. In chapter 5 the Theological Advisory Commission of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) summed up neatly in seven theses the theological Asian reflection on interreligious dialogue. In chapter 7 the Ten Commandments of Interreligious Dialogue (what not to do and what to do) are summed up by Leonard Swidler.

If we look back at the Philippine Church and at Church vital issues of the last twenty-five years, interreligious dialogue, at least in the pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has not taken the same priority and importance as in recent Papal and FABC teaching on ecumenism. After Vatican II, the Philippine Bishops were interested in ecumenism, but due to historical circumstances under the Marcos dictatorship social justice and human rights took precedence over ecumenical issues, and under the Aquino administration the CBCP focused its attention on the charismatic movement and Fundamentalism, as well as on agrarian reform and environment. Interfaith dialogue with the great Asian religions has never taken the center stage in the teaching or life of the Philippine Church, and perhaps this book may prod the Catholic Church to take the initiative towards inter-religious dialogue.

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