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Review

## Interreligious Learning – Dialogue, Spirituality and the Christian Imagination



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ding "Walking the City" (1999), "Traces of the Other" (2000) and "Theology and the Dialogue of Religions" (2002).

In this book, the author highlights the importance and the responsibility for interreligious dialogue, but also the meaning of hospitality and welcome to the other, while maintaining the difference and particularity. In this context we can also speak about the importance of personal identity.

The main idea of the book is that a faith that learns how to engage imaginatively with another religious world constantly returns to the "home" tradition, reinvigorated in its appreciation of the other.

In the first section of this book ("Meetings"), the author shows that the practices of faith, from the prayerful cultivation of interiority to the more exterior works of witness, build up a certain learned ability to move between religious worlds. Here he suggests that by developing a model of a religious tradition as a "school of faith", where teachers and learners can meet, a forum is created within which theological questions about the meaning of beliefs, actions, prayers and rituals can be addressed with proper integrity.

According to the author, the dialogue may not be the enemy of truth, but the relationship can become problematic, if the object of the exercise is the negotiated settlement of some knotty problem, a degree of compromise and accommodation enters the picture. Barnes says: "when common projects are worked on, when important concerns are shared, when different accounts of ultimate reality are discussed, not only is mutual understanding built up and barriers broken down, but a new light is often cast on whole areas of life that have largely been taken for granted. It is not just that one learns more about the other, but also that one learns more about the self".

He continues that for many people who live in a pluralist multicultural world, faith is deepened, not diluted, by the encounter with another religion or way of life, because learning about another religious tradition goes hand in hand with learning about one's own.

In this interreligious dialogue and sharing we can remark more than a valuable resource for promoting social cohesion in a pluralist society, but essential to the proper articulation of Christian faith. As method, it is very important to see this approach as a "comparative theology", reading the texts of another religious tradition from a consciously Christian theological perspective. We must read intelligently, prayerfully, theologically, so that what is being assimilated becomes a source of wisdom and learning beyond the community of faith to which it originally belonged.

The second section, entitled "Crossings", shows us that persons need to be translated, crossing over a cultural border, if they are to learn the skills and sensitivities that dialogue demands.

Michael Barnes underlines the importance of the context for understanding different traditions, as an interpersonal re-engagement with the Christian tradition.

In his book, "Theology and the Dialogue of Religion", Barnes described a practice of Christian faith nourished by the Eucharist that built up a Christian habitus, an instinct of hospitality and welcome to the other. Now he is developing a cumulative argument for an interreligious learning that grows out of a range of meetings, encounters and conversations.

The last section "Imaginings", takes up some of the more ethical and political implications of dialogue.

In conclusion, as a personal recommendation, I think in this interreligious dialogue we must promote generous respect for interreligious learning of a lot of common values, in a spirituality of dialogue that offers the possibility of enriching the human being.