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One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility, by Paul F. Knitter

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next generation as seriously as your own; (5) defend the rights and the future of weaker human beings; (6) take part in dismantling neglect and discrimination; (7) carry on personal, social and political conflicts without violence; (8) make use of nature in a manner commensurate with its dignity and contribute to the natural foundations of life; (9) take part in social and political responsibility; and (10) bear responsibility for how you use your freedom" (p. 149). Are these principles so broad as to be morally innocuous—or even invidious inasmuch as the admonition of tolerance may protect bullies and perverts? Which institutions disseminate them? How is agreement reached?

Huber is not naive to the numerous objections his principles may provoke. Nonetheless, a response to these objections is not the aim of the book. His principal aim is that governments, and also churches, families, schools, corporations—all who wish to safeguard their dignity and liberty—become mindful of the need for "minimum standards for coexistence." Importantly, Huber is not asking the church to forgo discussions of doctrine and other issues related to its theological identity; still, he is not convinced that the church always acts in the best interests of human dignity. Sometimes it does; sometimes it does not. In any case, Huber believes the church must take part in a larger conversation for the sake of a more peaceful, less violent world.

CHARLES MARSH, *Loyola College in Maryland*.

KNITTER, PAUL F. *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995. xiv+218 pp. \$17.00 (paper).

More than anyone else in North America, Paul Knitter has brought together in his writings a concern for social justice and the problem of the Christian theology of religions. Now Knitter responds to the critics of his pluralist theology by claiming that the best way to pursue interreligious dialogue is to base that dialogue on a commitment to "global responsibility" (i.e., praxis which leads to the well being of human beings and the environment). Few of his critics will be appeased by his response. Some of his readers will be put off by his uncompromising insistence on liberating political praxis as the sole basis for interreligious dialogue. Nevertheless, voices such as Knitter's, which seek to link the theology of liberation with the theology of religions, need to be heard.

Knitter organizes his critics into two groups: postliberals (like Joseph D'Noia) and postmodernists (like Kenneth Surin). In Knitter's view, both criticize pluralism by arguing that religions are irreducibly diverse and by objecting to the imperialism implicit in the claim of Knitter, Hick, and others that all religions share in a common essence. Knitter responds to his critics by underscoring the need for a "globally responsible" dialogue among religions. False pluralism homogenizes religions into a common essence. Authentic pluralism is correlational, hermeneutical, and most important, globally responsible. Suffering (on the part of the oppressed and the environment) constitutes a de facto universal that provides a basis for interfaith conversations. In Knitter's view, suffering constitutes the context for dialogue, not another candidate for a common essence. Postmodernist claims for undecidable diversity fail ethically by leading to bourgeois relativism. If all is relative, then all will be decided by prevailing structures of power. Instead of the postmodern "dominance of diversity," Knitter pleads for the "dominance of responsibility." Such global responsibility offers a middle path between modernity's universal claims and postmodernity's insistence on irreducible incommensurabil-

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ity. The poor are to be given a hermeneutically privileged voice at the dialogue table at the expense of academics and the official representatives of religious traditions, indicating not their moral superiority but rather the fact that some voices are more urgent than others given the ecological and social crisis confronting us.

The critics of the pluralist theology of religions will not be silenced by this book. Despite his claims to the contrary, Knitter is still asserting religious universals. For example, global responsibility can be said to be the only proper issue for interreligious dialogue because all religions can recognize *soteria*, which refers to the well-being of the earth and the oppressed, as a universal truth and norm. *Soteria* is variously described as "salvation," "mystery," the "Primordial Liberating Experience," and even "the encounter with the *divinum*" (with a footnote on Buddhist emptiness which, Knitter believes, is not equivalent to the divine but points in that direction).

Knitter's proposal also places severe constraints on the possibilities for dialogue. Religions that are not committed to Knitter's liberationist ideals are irrelevant (at best) to the dialogue process. Religions that legitimize social structures always need to be resisted. Should not Christian theologians interested in other religions be at least a little interested in why social criticism is a subsidiary theme in most religious traditions? For example, the concept of social justice is not a traditional Hindu category. Why is it necessary for Hindus to convert (see p. 133) to this perspective in order to dialogue "authentically"? Dialogue with Hindus, in contrast, may require (and also enable) Christians to revise their understanding of social justice in ways Christians such as Paul Knitter will not find congenial.

Despite these objections, globally responsible praxis holds out great promise as a topic for dialogue and as a context for initiating dialogue. Knitter's reflections on his travels through India and Sri Lanka and his conversations with politically active Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and (especially) Christian believers give abundant witness to this fact. In a companion volume to this book, entitled *Jesus and the Other Names* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1996), Knitter continues these promising reflections. Insisting that concern for global responsibility constitutes the only basis for dialogue places unnecessary constraints at the outset on what is allowed in conversations between those who follow different religious paths.

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BOFF, LEONARDO. *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*. Translated by JOHN CUMMING. Ecology and Justice Series. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995. xii+187 pp. \$14.95 (paper).

COBB, JOHN B., JR. *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy*. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1994. xii+148pp. \$12.95 (paper).

From the South and from the North: in compact crystallizations, bare of academic conceit, two leading shifters of their continents' respective theological shapes present their diagnoses and prescriptions for a diseased planet. Each stretches the mind around a totality of environmental, economic, and social powers running and ruining global life at the millennium. Writing from more or less opposed social locations, their priorities diverge and converge in meaningful ways. What brings the two authors into such close orbit is their collusion in the conversion of progressive Christianity into a force, not just for single issue politics, but for a multidimensional coalescence of prophetic analysis. On such coalescences may rest our hope for coalitions strong enough to answer transnational market forces.