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Book Review: "Inter-religious Dialogue: Voices From A New Frontier"

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Inter-religious Dialogue: Voices From A New Frontier. M. Darrol Bryant and Frank Flinn (eds). N.Y.: Paragon House, 1989 xx + 234p.

INITIATIVES ARE OFTEN a response to a felt-need of the time, to a situation that is challenging and thus demanding a response from the well-meaning people. Interfaith dialogue initiative is one such response. In the past there were certainly attempts at dialogue to bring people together, to reconcile the divergent ideologies. But they were often solitary voices amidst a dominant culture of conquest. But what is happening today is rather a movement towards dialogue, a widely accepted concern of breaking the barriers built up for centuries, with a different understanding of the approach and the goal.

In this climate of dialogue one more publication on this theme is well received with a view to gain further insights from the experiences of different believers in and promoters of dialogue. This book is a collection of twenty-four write-ups on inter-religious dialogue by the followers of different religious convictions. The editors have selected these essays presented at the Assembly of World's Religions held at McAfee, New Jersey, in 1985. The essays themselves are well classified as "Marking the Frontier", "Journeys to the Frontier", "Resources at the Frontier" and "Issues at the Frontier" and each section is succinctly introduced.

The postscript of the editors sums up the role of dialogue at this moment of history. "Dialogue has become important in the latter half of the twentieth century because it is a key to identity today—an identity arising from teaching and learning, and listening and speaking to our fellow human beings. The universal dialogue with all types of humans who display all types of faith promises to be the archrelation for our relation to the ultimate and the to the nature" (p. 222).

While reading through the collection of articles one comes across images like pilgrimage, journeying to the frontier, discoveries, harmony, voices, surprises and so on repeatedly. Though a mixed metaphor is at play, one

cannot miss the trend of this decade, a moment of dialogue, a meeting point of cultures and religions. People of different religious traditions are willing to meet their co-religionists, ready to listen to them and even attend other religious services than their own with some ease and in that process they find themselves discovering their identity at a deeper level and finding an urge to articulate them. In fact the editors sum up in three points what lies ahead in this volume. First of all it is faith that sustains us in our religious journey enabling us to be authentic. Secondly the encounter in such a journey will be full of surprises and thirdly the terrain is only explored and its valleys and plains are not yet mapped out (p. xx).

It is true that these essays reflect a different attitude of openness towards people of other religions. There is even a spirit of enthusiasm displayed for such a venture, finding ways of interpreting one's own religious tradition in terms of dialogue. What is important is the awareness that is being created through such meetings and publications. It is operating on a level of mutual acceptance and not on a theological forum with arguments. It is true we need clarity of perspectives regarding theological issues involved in this venture. But that should not hinder the initiative which needs a different logistics which is yet to be articulated. These essays here reflect the mood in which dialogue is taking place at the moment but also pointing out the horizons that need to be envisaged in our further attempts at the inter-religious dialogue.

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