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Title: Cheetham, D., Pratt, D., & Thomas, D. (Eds.). (2013).
Understanding interreligious relations. Oxford, UK:
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In the current context of globalization, people from different cultures and religious faiths have to learn how to live together. This is probably the main reason why theological studies and interreligious issues encounter an increasing popularity among scholars but also in the public Media. Through their edited volume *Understanding interreligious relations*, Cheetham, Pratt, and Thomas propose a theological, historical, and socio-political perspective on interreligious relations. The editors did a great job in gathering philosophers, theologians, and historians who are experts in their domain, and provide us with a thorough perspective on this key issue in our age of increased global religious diversity. The volume includes a collection of 16 chapters written by experts in their field of study that can be divided into two main parts.

The first part, which includes 6 chapters, aims to provide the reader with clear and concise introductions to the ways in which different religions conceive, construct, and address the question of “the religious other”. In the first chapter, Cheetham discusses the definition of, and the underlying theories behind, the conceptions of “religion” and “the religious other” by addressing two issues: (1) the validity of “religion” and “the religious other” as a general topic in science, and (2) the reflection on the practice of meeting “the religious other”. The chapter by Long, after introducing a definition of Hinduism, aims to provide the reader with a sense of how Hindus have related to “the religious other” historically from the Indus civilization to the modern Hinduism era. Long concludes that Hindus’ attitudes toward “the religious other” encompass a large spectrum of possibilities from fear, hatred, and Hindu nationalism to a radical inclusivism. In the contribution of Kessler, an historical perspective of the relations between Judaism and other religions is presented through important periods for the Jewish history and identity. Kessler argues that, despite restricted social interactions with the non-Jewish world, due, for instance, to Jewish ritual requirements, Judaism has been influenced by, and has influenced other religions such as Christianity. Harris, in chapter four, focuses on how Buddhism has consolidated its practice and beliefs in a context of interreligious exchange. Through textual and historical analysis of interreligious relations in the Buddhist world, the author develops five faces (i.e. respectful debate, teaching of Buddhist ideas, ridicule of the

practices/beliefs of “the other”, the subordination of “the other”, and the appropriation/modification of “the religious other”) of Buddhist response to “the religious other”. In chapter five, Schmidt-Leukel develops the question of “the religious other” in Christianity by focusing on (1) the construction of “the other” in the authoritative Biblical scriptures and ecclesial documents, (2) the brief investigation of Christianity’s relations to various other religions, and (3) the presentation of inner Christian positions regarding the theological conception of the relationship to religious other. Schmidt-Leukel highlights that Christian theologians have constantly hesitated between three positions (i.e. exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism) and concludes that, in contemporary Christianity, all three positions still have strong defenders. Finally, the last contribution of Thomas addresses the issue of Islam and “the religious other” through the rich body of religious literature about the relations between Islam and other faiths in the Quran and through the fourteen hundred years of history of interreligious contact involving the Muslim world. This careful analysis of sacred texts and history converges on the conclusion that, whereas several verses praising religious pluralism might be found in the Quran, there is a general consensus among Muslims about the superiority of Islam and its teachings relative to other religious faiths.

In the second part of the volume which includes 10 additional chapters, the contributors analyze a rather broad selection of key issues and debates in the domain of interreligious relations such as, for instance, interreligious conversion or interreligious cooperation. The chapter by Wingate focuses on interreligious conversion both at the individual and at the community level, such as mass conversions. Wingate carefully reviews the definition of conversion, illustrates the process of conversion, and analyses human experiences that may be found in conversion. The contribution of Moyaert tackles another key issue in the domain of interreligious relations, namely the interreligious dialogue. Throughout the chapter, the author investigates the dynamics of this extremely complex phenomenon from various perspectives including a descriptive, historical, etymological, as well as philosophical point of view. Phan and Tan propose an analysis of the dynamics of the interreligious majority-minority relation through the paradigmatic case of Muslim-Christian relations, in both Muslim and Christian countries. In the last part of their chapter, the authors also introduce how interreligious dialogue might profitably occur from a Roman Catholic point of view. The chapter by Pratt focuses on three key phenomena that may severely impair harmonious interreligious relations: religious fundamentalism, exclusivism, and extremism. Pratt begins with a thorough and critical discussion of the meaning of the term “fundamentalism” to better understand the phenomenon, then explores the problematic dimensions of religious exclusivism for a peaceful interfaith dialogue, and finally examines the problem of religious extremism and religiously motivated terrorism. The contribution of Halafoff introduces the interesting and comforting idea that, whereas interreligious encounters might create conflict and violence, these interfaith contacts can also create important peace-building opportunities. Halafoff highlights the role of religion in conflict transformation through the examination of the interfaith movements’ commitment. Adam’s chapter tackles ethical and political challenges that face interreligious engagement in the public sphere and investigates a series of contradictions emerging from the recent literature regarding the role of religion in the public sphere. Aguilar outlines in his chapter the main areas of dialogue in our

religiously diverse and modern society which may lead to an interreligious dialogue based on universal acceptance: the importance of a central dialogue of common humanity, the work for a common liberation of human beings, and a model of dialogue that recognizes justice as a central component. In her contribution to this volume, Cornille addresses the type and specificities of multiple religious belongings as well as the resulting complex and ambivalent relations with the interreligious dialogue. Vishanoff provides interesting insights and case studies regarding the construction of religious identities and boundaries, the maintenance of such boundaries between religious communities, as well as information regarding how individuals cross those boundaries to interact with “the religious other”. Finally, Wellers explores in his chapter different questions and issues (i.e. confidence-building, who cooperates with whom) regarding interreligious cooperation through concrete situations such as, for an example of one, the World Conference of Religious Peace (WCRP).

This volume offers a broad and extensive overview of how different religious communities (i.e. Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam) conceive, consider, and interact with “the religious other”. The common finding is that there is no single viewpoint or consensus about the understanding of “the religious other” or how different religious groups should relate to each other. The key lesson we should take from this is probably that none of the investigated religions has constantly promoted, through history or sacred texts, a definitive negative or positive conception of otherness. Within each religious faith, a positive, curious, and embracing regard for “the religious other” might be found. Besides violence, religious wars, or religious extremism, mutual education and cooperation has also been a constant in the religious world. In pointing out key issues that might hinder (i.e. religious proselytism, fundamentalism, exclusivism, extremism, conflict ...) or pacify interreligious relations (i.e. religious dialogue, cooperation, interfaith peace-building), the contributors carefully analyze the dynamics of these phenomenon and highlight different pathways to overcome several difficulties encountered in interreligious contact to possibly resolve these problems. Finally, the editors state that people should fight ignorance since an active recognition, acceptance, and engagement with individuals from different religions remains the most important challenge in a world where interreligious relations is a social reality.

To conclude, although the book *Understanding interreligious relations* does not really answer the question of how religious people actually react in the face of religious others (by, for example, measuring prejudice or prosocial behavior), it provides the reader with valuable insight regarding how different religious faiths conceive otherness historically, philosophically, and through the sacred literature. Furthermore, it tackles key societal issues that relate directly to interreligious relations and illustrates remarkably, through concrete case studies, the dynamics of interfaith contacts, which is a key issue in our contemporary and globalized society.