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Public Theology, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Learning, edited by Manfred L. Pirner, Johannes Lähnemann, Werner Haussmann, and Susanne Schwarz, New York & London: Routledge, 2018, *Routledge Research in Religion and Education*, 218 pp., US\$140.00, £105:00 (hb), ISBN 978-1-138-58392-4 (hb), ISBN 978-0-4295-0639-0 (eb)

“Toward a Global Ethic” is both the title and the goal of the initial declaration which aimed to establish a shared ethical framework for all people across religious lines. Drafted by Hans Küng and promulgated by the Council of the Parliament of the World’s Religions, the document was presented to the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in September 1993, where over 200 religious authorities from more than 40 faith traditions signed the agreement. The basic points of the proposed ethics for the common good are non-violence, economic justice, tolerance, and equality. While this laid important foundation stones, questions arise about theologies and the specific religions traditions as well as about religious differences and otherness in plural societies.

Public Theology, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Learning, edited by Manfred Pirner, Johannes Lähnemann, Werner Haussmann, and Susanne Schwarz, intends to address these very questions and related current issues. It is the first of a two-volume project, which makes available the contributions to the twelfth Nuremberg Forum on “Public Theology – Religion(s) – Education”, an international conference which took place in October 2016. The first part of this volume is about thinking and doing theology in the

public sphere of a plural, multicultural, multi-religious, and even globalised world. Taking into consideration several religious perspectives but also concepts of sociology and religious studies, the book explores the contributions of religions to the common good from different religious viewpoints. The opening important insight for learning processes, in the chapter by Dirk J. Smit, is that “there are only contextual perspectives and they, too, are ever changing” (13). This is evident in the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* in terms of mending the world, as Sabrina Worch’s contribution demonstrates, and in the Islamic idea of ‘critical faithfulness’ in the European Muslim diaspora, which includes, as Abdullah Sahin points out, “values of critical openness to learning from one another (*taaruf*), gratitude (*shukr*), active citizenship and civil engagement” (38). Heesoon Bai’s chapter shows this to be the case also in the Buddhist engagement in promoting a post-ego consciousness “for increasing world cooperation and peace” (55). In their joint chapter, Gert Pickel and Annette Schnabel refer to empirical studies in Europe, which show that “religions support such civil involvement through providing values of altruism and respectfulness, through generating trust in others and in institutions to bind people to norms of reciprocity and fairness, and through engendering social capital” (89). These findings extend, as Pirner explicates in his chapter, our horizon for learning processes, not only from various religions but also from different worldviews and draw attention to consensual norms and ethical standards for the common good.

The second part of the book focuses on the challenges of interreligious dialogue and learning. Because of forced migration to Europe and in particular to Germany, Heinrich Bedford-Strohm states that “the question of integration and interreligious dialogue [...] is one of the most urging [sic] issues for public theology in the country” (107). In subsequent chapters, different European (the contributions by Philip Barnes, Bernd Schröder, and Thomas Schlag) and international (the contributions by Jenny Berglund and Zehavit Gross) explanations of religious education provide substantiated justification from different perspectives. Their authors refer to various legal

foundations and theoretical principles of religious education in Europe.

The last two chapters present best practices. Lähnemann and Haussmann show, respectively, the ways in which interreligious education in state schools can be successful and strengthened, through examples of cooperation with interreligious NGOs and interfaith initiatives as well as attitudes nurtured in school, such as mindfulness, acknowledgement, and appreciation.

This volume affords a good overview of the current challenges of (inter-)religious education in Western immigrant societies and considers different academic and contextual perspectives. From a normative as well as from an empirical viewpoint, the authors seek to make comprehensible what kinds of social contribution religions provide for the common good in Europe and how important (inter-)religious education is. This is related with considerations of a responsible public theology which embraces the notions of dialogue and discourse in the public sphere.

Nevertheless, there remain open questions in this field of learning: who has the power to define religions and common goods in Western immigrant societies? The residents or the immigrants? In view of cultural, social, and language barriers, who has access to and is able to participate in the so-called public sphere? What about the increasing number of non-religious people? Is it possible to assume that religion is something basic and essential to being human? In any case, it remains a substantial task for public theology to engage (with) and translate the common good in societies which are both multi-religious and secular.

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