

# Preface

The importance of interfaith relations, which is the focus of this work, cannot be over-emphasized in our times. During his recent visit to Turkey, Pope Francis called for dialogue to assist in ending fundamentalism and terrorism. Advocating interreligious initiatives in the context of promoting peace and the flourishing of life for all, the pontiff insists that adopting an attitude of openness in truth and love must be the hallmark of our dialogue with adherents of non-Christian religions. This attitude of openness includes accepting others and their different ways of living, thinking, and speaking. Pope Francis also emphasizes the importance and the transformative power of listening to others. Aware that our planet is being threatened by human greed and excessive consumption, he has called upon people of different religions to work together to care for the Earth, our common home.

In respecting the fundamental differences that exist between various religious traditions, Pope Francis does not advocate a facile syncretism that would become absolute for all but instead believes that true openness means remaining steadfast in our own beliefs and convictions. In other words, those taking part in interreligious dialogue must be clear and joyful in their own religious identity and at the same time open to the understanding of others. The grace of God that Christians experience in Jesus Christ must be shared with others so that their lives may also flourish. At the same time, deeply aware that no one has a monopoly on truth and grace, Christians must be prepared to learn from other traditions.

In his recent encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis says that the global environmental deterioration we are facing should encourage religions to dialogue with one another for the sake of protecting nature and defending the poor. The gravity of the ecological crisis

should motivate adherents of different religions to work together for the welfare of humanity. This task requires us to be patient, self-disciplined, and generous in seeking the common good. From the outset, the pontiff attempts to show how Christians' faith convictions, as well as those of other believers, should lead them to care for our environment and for the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters.

In view of the church's call for dialogue, I have embarked on a journey to explore Christianity's checkered history in its relationships with other faiths through the centuries by studying those pioneers who took bold steps towards understanding the so-called "pagans." This work begins with Matteo Ricci and his companions, who established the Roman Catholic Church in China in the sixteenth century, and concludes with Hans Küng's concept of *humanum* for judging the authenticity of a religion. In many ways this work is a sequel to my earlier book, *Are Non-Christians Saved?*, in which I explored Joseph Ratzinger's approach to religious pluralism. In this present volume, I have identified others who have taken a somewhat different approach to Ratzinger's normative understanding of Christianity in relation to other religious beliefs.

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