Interreligious Encounters

Opportunities and Challenges

Michael Amaladoss

Editor(s): Jonathan Y. Tan


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Review
There are two kinds of academic writing, if we classify the work by the nature of the author’s expertise. The first one, the most prevalent, is the kind of writing that is born out of the scholarly work of the author and is primarily based on research and teaching experience. The second kind, comparatively harder to come by, is the writing of a scholar that is the result of an entire lifetime of study, research, teaching, understanding, and more importantly, dialogue. *Interreligious Encounters* is a rare gem of the second kind of academic writing. When the reader lays their hands on it, and sees the name of the author, they are already overawed with great expectation and tremendous reverence.

Michael Amaladoss is a rare theologian and practitioner, who has long critically examined his own faith tradition in order to have meaningful dialogue with other faiths. He was born a Christian in India but was highly influenced by other Indian faith-traditions and philosophical systems, particularly Advaita Vedanta. A Jesuit priest par excellence, he has been teaching novitiates for about half a century. His boldness is seen in his questioning the church’s “superiority complex that is very detrimental to dialogue” (xxxiv). His editor, Jonathan Y. Tan, has done an excellent job of putting Amaladoss’s entire work on interreligious dialogue in a concise form. Calling Amaladoss an “Interreligious Theologian Par Excellence” (xvii), Tan presents Amaladoss’s perspective as a theological approach that “sees that the starting point of theologizing generally, and interreligious theologizing in particular, is a social analysis of the situation of people’s lived experiences within the matrix of their sociocultural location and context” (xviii).

Amaladoss’s work brings home the necessity to critically question one’s own faith before venturing to dialogue with other traditions. Without this, all attempts at interreligious dialogue become mere unconnected eulogies of different faiths. Before understanding other faiths, one has to admit the possibility that “other religions and churches may [be] witness to aspects of the divine mystery which the church itself has not experienced” (xxxiv). Logically developing the argument for a dynamic two-way interreligious dialogue, *Interreligious Encounters* discusses philosophy, individual religious life, religion in family, religion in society, and the problems of dialogue in a multireligious context.

One of the important contributions of Amaladoss in *Interreligious Encounters* is the positing of a “Double Religious Identity” (157). In societies having multireligious environments, Amaladoss envisions a religious identity attached to more than one religion. This becomes pertinent in the context of proselytization, when it is common that the person who is converted to a particular religion is unable to completely give up the symbols, principles, or practices of the religion into which she or he was born.
In sum, *Interreligious Encounters* is a sharp and succinct take on the subject, and will be matchless for a long time to come.

**About the Reviewer(s):**  
Swami Narasimhananda is the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

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**About the Author(s)/Editor(s)/Translator(s):**  
Michael Amaladoss, SJ, is author of 21 books, including *The Asian Jesus*, and a leading figure in the field of interreligious dialogue.

Jonathan Y. Tan is Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan Professor of Catholic Studies at Case Western Reserve University. He is the author of *Introducing Asian American Theologies* and *Christian Mission among the Peoples of Asia*.

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