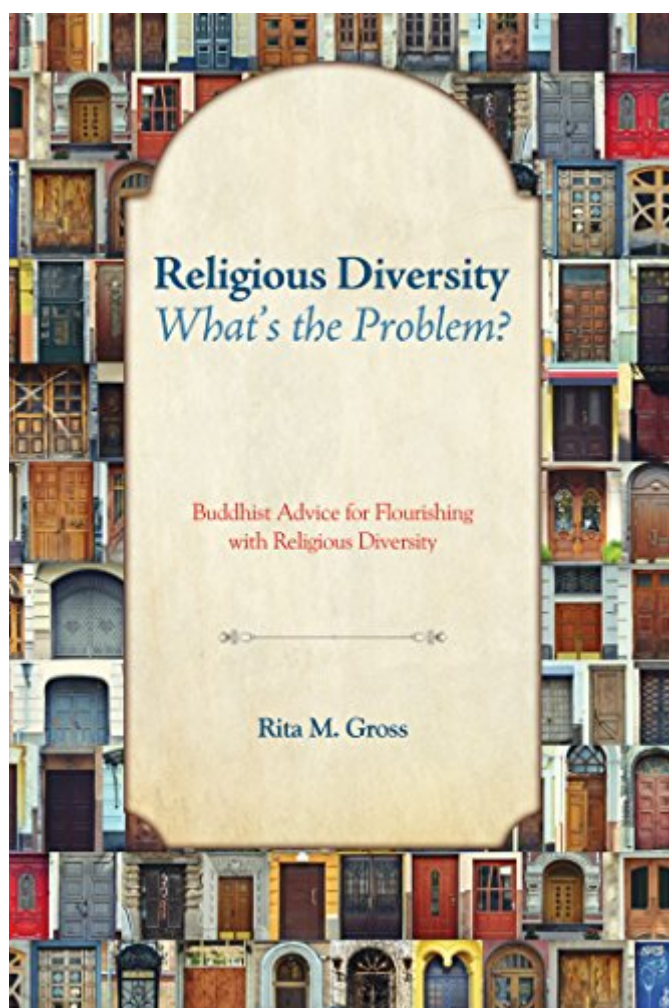


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Religious Diversity—What's the Problem?: Buddhist Advice For Flourishing With Religious Diversity



Synopsis

Once upon a time, on grounds of both religion and common sense, people assumed that the earth was flat and that the sun literally rose and set each day. When newly developing knowledge made those beliefs untenable, giving them up was difficult. Today the belief that only one of the world's various religions is true for all people on earth is equivalent to the belief in a flat earth. Both notions have become untenable, given contemporary knowledge about religion. Even though many people are still troubled by the existence of religious diversity today, that diversity is a fact of life. Religious diversity should be no more troubling to religious people than the fact that the earth is round and circles the sun. This provocative book, based on the author's longtime practice of Buddhism and comparative study of religion, provides tools with which one can truly appreciate religious diversity as a gift and resource rather than as a deficiency or a problem to be overcome. After we accept diversity as inevitable and become comfortable with it, diversity always enriches life--both nature and culture. "Let me dare say that no Christian theologian of religions is going to be able to carry on her/his work without dealing with this book. It's a conversation-starter and changer. With her penetrating critique of exclusive truth claims and of traditional Western understandings of otherness and identity, Gross will both disturb and enrich the ongoing discourse on how to understand and deal with religious diversity. I found it challenging, enlightening, and inspiring."--Paul F. Knitter, Emeritus Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture, Union Theological Seminary

Rita Gross personifies religious diversity. She grew up in a religiously exclusive Christian church, was disfellowshipped, converted to another religion, and then another. In the meantime, she became one of the world's leading religious scholars. Drawing on both personal experience and scholarly expertise, she has written the best book on religious diversity I have ever read."--Terry C. Muck, Executive Director, Louisville Institute

"Today the 'growing tip' for every religion is its inevitable encounter with other religions. We can cling ever harder to conventional dogmas or we can open up to the new perspectives and possibilities that other traditions offer. But how does one actually embark on the challenging path of genuine dialogue and engagement? The fruit of Rita Gross's many years participating in interreligious dialogue, *Religious Diversity--What's the Problem?*, applies the psychological insights and spiritual wisdom of the Buddhist tradition to a task that is becoming increasingly necessary in our globalizing world."--David R. Loy, author of *Money Sex War Karma*

"In this timely, engaging, and provocative work, Rita Gross takes up the issue of religious diversity in the modern world and--from her longtime studies and experience as a feminist, theologian, and Buddhist practitioner--offers us creative and insightful ways to live with, appreciate, and even flourish with it."--Jan Willis, author of *Dreaming Me*

Rita M. Gross is Professor Emerita of

Comparative Studies of Religion at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and a Senior Dharma Teacher in the Nyingma Lineage of Vajrayana Buddhism. A past president of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, she has participated in many forums for interreligious exchange. Gross is the author of many books and articles. Her major work is *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (1993).

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Prof req

Acharya Rita M. Gross invites a look into the identity of self and others and the nature of interaction with regard to religious affiliation. The author's disposition is nondualistic and Buddhist. The book opens with a personal experience when Acharya Rita was a college student at age 21. It energized a lifelong career and this book. It also fuels the reading experience: we want to see how the one

time college student ends up processing the experience and expressing herself decades and many accomplishments later. The main thesis is that religious diversity could be viewed as natural as diversity in nature or art and as expectable. She writes, "It seems like sheer nonsense to imagine there could be One True Poem. It would be very helpful if people were equally skeptical about One True Religion." Two other major theses follow: that exclusive truth claims are harmful, of no benefit to the larger populace, and could easily be dropped without affecting one's religious life. Also, that when religious and political authority merge and unite, the population could be harmed. "State neutrality - nonduality - gives space for both proreligious and antireligious factions to make their arguments and to flourish. ... I can think of no point that, when understood, contributes more to flourishing with religious diversity in a multireligious state," Gross writes. The development of these themes brings the reader into the perspectives of nonduality and Buddhist teachings. This book is a good way to learn about Buddhism! I would like to introduce the little-known term diunitality, or diunital consciousness (or diunital thinking, diunital view) as an alternative to the terms neutrality or nonduality when it comes to speaking of a world view that means two and one at the same time. In the diunital world view, opposite qualities -- e.g., right and wrong, Christian and Islamic, left wing and right wing -- remain along with an understanding and a knowing that transcends those opposites. The blogger Agabond writes, "In diunital thinking you see things in their fullness, as being independent and equal. Different does not mean unequal. Different is just different." This is an academic book that anyone can appreciate and enjoy, especially those investigating their true human nature while working toward a community or world consisting of healthy interactions among people of all inclinations: the religious, the anti-religious, and the non-religious.

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