

## ASIAN

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**BOOK REVIEW**

**Prof. Dr Hans Waldenfels, SJ**, *In-Between: Essays in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2011. Pages: xii+156. ISBN: 978-81-89958-47-3.

This book consisting of six chapters is originally the annual Dharma Endowment Lectures of 2011, conducted by the Faculty of Philosophy, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. The book has the interesting title *In-Between*. The first chapter explains human being as a being in-between.

From womb to tomb he is in-between. The whole drama of his life is played out in-between. In the family, in the school, in the place of work, in the place of recreation, everywhere he is in-between. He is in-between fellow human beings, animals and other creatures. This in-between can have several dimensions. Sometimes he is united with his fellow human beings in love and friendship; sometimes he depends on others for his well-being and even for his survival; there are also instances, when he uses and exploits them for his selfish interests (pp. 5-6).

The second chapter reminds us of the fact that religion plays a crucial role in man's being in-between. In today's world of extra fast mobility, intercommunication and globalisation, the in-between of persons has very evident social dimensions. We may say that any part of the world has become multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious. Today there is a general tendency to understand religion as the 'way'. The many 'ways' connected with Zen Buddhism are known even in the Western world. They are 'concrete ways', which influence the daily life of ordinary people. When we turn our attention to Christianity, 'religion' is not a biblical concept. However, 'way' is a central concept in the teachings of Jesus (pp. 42-43).

The third chapter deals with the theme "Secular Age". The author reminds us of the fact that a human person's being in-between has not only a horizontal but also a vertical aspect. We could say that man's immanence is crossed by transcendence (pp. 49-50). In other words, man lives between heaven and earth. However, in modern times this type of deliberation is confronted with a sudden rupture. Many do not believe any more in a heaven. Earth alone remains the beginning and end of their existence. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is perhaps one of the pioneers of this line of thinking with his 'death of God philosophy'. This new situation is called today 'secular society', 'secular world', or 'secular city' (pp. 50-51). Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher of Catholic origin affirms that modern man is confronted with the possibility to

choose between belief and unbelief. Today it is possible to live in the society without believing in God's existence (p. 62).

In the fourth chapter, the author reminds us of the fact that in the intercultural and interreligious encounter language has a crucial role to play. In the general process of communication language is the most important factor. My partner in dialogue should first understand what I am talking about. This is all the more true in the context of India, where numerous languages and dialects are spoken (p. 72).

The fifth chapter emphasises the point that the terms "intercultural" and "interreligious" and reminds us of the fact that the encounter between cultures and religions is a multidimensional undertaking in which all have to be sincere and open to learn from the other (p. 109). Dialogue should not be used as a tactical means to impose one's own view on the other. 'Inter' means that we start from different angles of the world and meet somewhere in-between (p. 117).

The sixth chapter discusses the Divine in the form of Buddha and Christ. Their vision, words and actions still influence the world history. They originated from ethnically limited historical contexts: Buddhism was born from Hindu background; Christianity has Jewish roots. However both movements till today attract people from all races and nations; they are world religions (p. 120). In Buddhism, the term expressing the liberating experience is negative '*nirvāna*', extinguishing, blowing away, so that 'nothing' is left and yet 'nothingness' is not the appropriate translation, if it means the nihilistic nothing; *sūnyatā* = emptiness. It needs an ascetic, spiritual and meditative approach to realize the true meaning of 'emptiness' (p. 128).

For a long time the smilingly squatting enlightened Buddha and the painfully hanging and dying Christ on the cross seemed to be unable to meet. The famous Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani commented on the Christian confession to the kenotic Christ in the *Letter to the Philippians* 2: 5-8. For Christ taking the form of man and becoming a servant is 'making himself empty'. According to Nishitani, the central Buddhist notion of *sūnyatā*, emptiness finds a beautiful parallel in the notion of *kenosis*, self emptying of Christ as explained by St. Paul (pp. 129-131).

Prof. Waldenfels' profound expertise and vast experience in the field of intercultural and interreligious dialogue is clearly evident in this book. He does not hesitate to proclaim his firm conviction that finally humanity shall not survive without belief and a religious option (p.4). He brings to our attention also another very important and interesting point. The term inculturation was coined by theologians and missiologists after the Vatican II to describe the process of introducing the Gospel to new social and cultural environments. This term was considered characterising a positive attitude of the Church towards other religions and cultures. According to Prof. Waldenfels, however, inculturation is in fact a one-way action focusing on the transfer of Western civilizing and cultural values in the name of Christianity.

Therefore, supported by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, Prof. Wlادنfels pleads for a change in the terminology from inculturation to “interculturalisation” (p. 96). This term clearly implies mutuality and not one-sidedness. The term interculturalisation invites all to a readiness to learn from one another.

Of course, intercultural and interreligious dialogue is not an entirely new theme, because especially after the Vatican II, there were a lot of academic and practical activities in this field. However, the present work has a comprehensiveness and originality of its own. Therefore, “In-Between” could be a very useful guide for all those who are engaged in any sort of interreligious and intercultural endeavours.

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