

BOOK REVIEWS

Goddesses in Religions and in Modern Debate. Larry Hurtado, ed. University of Manitoba Studies in Religion, 1. Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1990.

This volume represents a collection of the papers which were presented during the course of a colloquium on the theme "Goddesses in World Religions and Modern Scholarship," sponsored by University of Manitoba's Religion Department in early 1988. All but two of the contributors are faculty members at the University of Manitoba. The volume, edited by Larry Hurtado, Professor of Religion and Director of the Institute for the Humanities at the University, contains seven papers which fall into two categories: those which deal with "Goddess Traditions" and those which are concerned with "The Modern Discussion" of the relationship between the female and the divine.

The four papers which appear under the heading of "Goddess Traditions" are primarily concerned with Asian religions, dealing as they do with goddesses in Chinese religion, Mahayana Buddhism, Hinduism and a final contribution on the spread of the Isis cult in the Hellenistic world. All of the papers are highly detailed (particularly the very informative survey of "Goddesses in Chinese Religions" by Alan K.L. Chan) and show evidence of a substantial amount of reworking from the more streamlined format of the colloquium paper. The additional information which is presented in the notes and bibliographies does not detract from the flow of the papers, however, but serves to make them of greater potential service to the reader.

The final three items which appear under the "Modern Discussion" heading shift focus from a description of the history and development of particular traditions, to an examination of various aspects of the contemporary interest in "the Goddess." All three papers note the appropriation of goddess themes by (mostly Western) women who seek not only to find new means of describing the present experience of women, but who also seek a means of conceiving and creating a new, and more desirable, future. One paper describes the various ways in which "the Goddess" is understood in recent Feminist scholarship, another provides an example of goddess figures as they appear in the works of two current writers, while the third paper (written by a professor of Anthropology) is quite critical of the way in which the

anthropological, archaeological, and sociological data are used and abused in the construction of a popular Goddess myth.

The collection of papers is a useful survey of thought on goddess/es both past and present and has been written, as editor Hurtado claims, "to be accessible by serious readers, regardless of their particular academic specialty" (p. vii). As such, it conforms very well to its stated objective of providing "a useful resource for a wide variety of readers, including scholars and students in Religious Studies, and Women's Studies."

Alan D. Bulley

Michael von Bruck, *The Unity of Reality: God, God-Experience, and Meditation in the Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (transl. from the German Original by J.V. Zeitz), New York: Paulist Press, Mahwah, 1991, pp. vi + 340.

As the sub-title of the book indicates, the work is meant as a theological contribution to inter-religious dialogue, more concretely, to the Hindu-Christian Dialogue. The work comes from some one who was a former professor of theology at an Institute in India and who is actively engaged and involved in the Hindu-Christian, and Buddhist-Christian dialogues. This calls for a serious study of the same. The unity of Reality is the basic theme of the reflections. It is a unity that is *advaitic* and trinitarian, a unity in differentiation, a relational unity. Being *advaitic* (non-dual) and trinitarian is explained as a matter of "implementarity", rather than of mere complementarity (p. 202).

The book is divided into three parts. The first part (pp. 15-72) is devoted to the Hindu understanding of Reality (*brahman*) as *advaitic*, more precisely, to the *advaita* doctrine of Sankara. The second part (pp. 75-140) is a study of the non-duality of the trinitarian concept of God. The third part (pp. 143-277), bears the same title of the book. The author presents there very interesting

and original ideas. He seems to develop an understanding of a trinitarian notion of God in dialogue with and by means of insights from Advaita doctrine.

Now I would like to invite the attention to some salient points of this study. The understanding of God's unity, as the author postulates, can be deepened by means of the Advaita insight. At the same time, the trinitarian theology can help solve the unsolved problem of the ontological status of *maya* as the creative power of God; *Maya* is the "how" of God who is infinite fullness and love. Hence he is relational and differentiated within himself. This leads to an interpretation of God as *advaitic trinity*. God's "what" is a being one, the self-integration of a self-movement. "Advaita is a process, not a result. God and humans are one, but not identical. They are in a temporal-eternal becoming one. It is this fact which the symbol of trinitarian *perichoresis* considers" (184). In the eyes of the author trinity is thus a valid symbol of this unity of Reality. This seems to me an *eisegesis* and an unwarranted explanation of the original Christian faith and teaching.

The book offers an interesting and enriching discussion on God's personality, whether he can be considered personal, non-personal or trans-personal (pp. 197-202). This discussion has its background in the concept of *nirguna-brahman*. The theme of rebirth or transmigration is dealt with elaborately and a Christian synthesis is attempted by employing the tripartite distinction of body, soul and spirit. The concept of "continuous manifestation" is introduced in order to clarify the point. The delicate issue of the particularity and universality of Jesus Christ is discussed and a solution to the problem is suggested by describing Jesus Christ as the concrete name for God's universal action. Then the author makes a distinction between the universal Christ and the particular manifestations of Christ, thereby implicitly denying the uniqueness of Jesus as the Christ. Thus, according to him "the universal Christ of the perichoretic process of the trinity is not only seen as Messiah, but also as the *Tathagata*, who enters into truth, i.e., the Buddha" (p. 262). Between the two there does not exist any historical link, but a trans-historical interrelationality. R. Panikker's influence is clearly perceivable here. At the same time the author seems to defend a certain normativity of the Christ-event in Jesus of Nazareth; "we

can accept that whatever does not contradict the experience of the historical Jesus Christ, could be regarded as the saving work of the trinitarian God" (*ibid.*).

A question in this connection would be how one and the same person of the universal Christ can manifest himself repeatedly in history. In order to hold this position one has to accept the theory of re-incarnation or transmigration. In that case, what would be the meaning of a history that is repeatable individually? The explanation of the Christ-event as *relatively* absolute (p. 246) on account of its being historically conditioned does not solve the problem.

The author also speaks of a Christocentrism with regard to salvation based on the concept of "absolute relativity", for the absolute *is* not. Its *is* is in a form, i.e., concrete (p. 246). Therefore he states: "God is perfectly in Christ and thus Christ is salvation and the *kyrios*. Outside this force-field... there is no salvation, because there is no outside" (*ibid.*). Here we find the author's attempt at constructing a Christology in the model of what he himself has described as "creative integration" (pp. 250-265), a laudable attempt which requires a lot of discernment.

The author's understanding of mission as a maieutic process which makes the implicit Christ as explicit as possible (p. 264) reflects K. Rahner's views of Mission in connection with the latter's theory of "anonymous Christians." Hence the same type of objections against Rahner's theory could be raised against Von Bruck's ideas.

My basic problem with the book is concerning the theological justification of speaking about the advaitic experience on a par with the trinitarian experience. The advaitic experience offers only of a mystical experience from within that is not or need not be objectively validated. But in the case of trinitarian experience, its basis is God's self-disclosure in the historical Christ-event, that appeals to the believer as subject from without and evoking in him/her a response from within - of course through the working of the Spirit. The objective and the *extra-nos* dimension of faith is an added element here that makes up the experience. That this component is lacking in the former case is not at all to devalue it. But the difference is not too slight to be overlooked.

The book, on the whole, deserves praise and serious study. It gives witness to the author's creativity and "creative integration". The many diagrams, the Sanskrit glossary, the index of names and general index add to the scientific nature of the book. The clear language of the author deserves special mention. A bibliography would not have been superfluous in this serious study.

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