

BOOK REVIEWS

W. Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991, pp. v + 69.

This booklet is meant as an introduction to Pannenberg's three-volume *Systematic Theology*. As such it contains basic themes of Christian faith that need systematic reflection. The author introduces to the readers some very fundamental questions and the method and direction of the theological answers. The Book provides adequate knowledge of the nature and task of systematic theology. Keeping the traditional Catholic distinction between fundamental and dogmatic theology, we may observe that the Book is concerned with issues of fundamental theology or Christian apologetics. After arguing for the need of systematic theology (ch. 1), the author produces to treat in the subsequent chapters the problems of a Christian doctrine of God (ch. 2), the doctrine of creation (ch. 3) and finally Christology (ch. 4).

The need for systematic theology is perceived as arising from the question of truth and credibility. Unless and until the God of Israel and of Jesus is shown to be the one and only true God, there is no sufficient reason for a non-Jew to believe in him. The Christian assertion that the God of Jesus is the one and only true God needs to be proved and confirmed. Hence the need for and task of systematic theology. Only when theology properly performs this task, the preaching will be effective which will strengthen the good conscience of the believer. In this task, theology must integrate into its synthesis the wealth of insights gained by the secular disciplines (p. 18); but at the same time, it should not shy away from interdisciplinary controversy (p. 19). This suggestion of Pannenberg deserves much attention.

The theologian is also called to restate the doctrine of God in terms of rational argument, although it has become a difficult task for many reasons (p. 23). The author makes certain critical observations on the contributions of P. Tillich and process theologians. He then argues that one cannot speak of God as personal without referring to the trinitarian persons. Hence "the exciting challenge" to theology to develop new ways of integrating our conception of the one God with the trinitarian doctrine of the Church" (p. 36).

In the present context of the modern scientific world view which has united the bonds of dependence that related the world to a creator God, there arises the need for a relevant theology of creation. Its task is to show how we can conceive this world as dependent on God. Some of the crucial questions it has to answer are as follows: How is the act of creation as an act in God's *eternity* consistent with the *contingency* of the events in their *temporal* sequence? How is God the creator related to the ongoing process of evolution? If there was not a world from eternity, how is the origin of any creature at all possible on the basis of eternity? Pannenberg tries to find an answer to such questions on the basis of the trinitarian doctrine, the idea of the Son as "generative principle of otherness" and on the biblical tradition of the involvement of the Spirit of God in the act of creation (pp. 42-47). In this connection, he speaks of the modern scientific concept of a field of force.

The concluding chapter on Christology brings into discussion the theme of Christ's uniqueness and universal significance for salvation. According to Pannenberg, if we surrender the truth claim that there is salvation in no one else, the Christian Church would lose its *raison d'être* (p. 54). This claim is based on the inevitable consequence of another faith claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God incarnate (p. 55). The reason for this claim rests on the extraordinary intimacy in Jesus' way of speaking about God as Father and in addressing him so (p. 58).

We have on the whole many stimulating questions and challenges being envisaged in the booklet that are daringly and confidently presented. The work contains the implicit promise of a systematic-critical and coherent-treatise from the author. The attempt deserves all praise and recognition on the one hand and it appeals to us for making similar ventures.

Sebastian Athappilly

Joseph Aruvvil, *Love Fulfilled*, Kottayam: Life Orientation Centre, 1992, pp. xxii 162, Rs. 80, ₹10.95

The religio-philosophical foundation of the *Gita* is interpreted as the Brahma-Nirvana in J. Aruvvil's work, *Love Fulfilled* and the author claims on the basis of his analysis of Phil. 2:3-11 that the same truth itself is the central message of the New Testament. In this Comparative Study of the *Gita* and the New Testament self-emptying is identified as the first and the crucial step in the process of self-fulfilment.

Self-emptying is necessarily related to the concept of *Sannyasa* in its various aspects, namely, selfless action (*Nishkamakarma*), and sense-control in the *Gita*. The three spiritual paths (*Karma, jnana, bhakti*) also effects a self-emptying leading to a personal attachment to God through his grace. This attachment develops into realization of Brahman. It is an experience of communion with God, an experience of salvation, enlightenment and authenticity. The study of Pauline pericope (Phil. 2:6-11) establishes that the fulfilment of Jesus' love and his exaltation also was through his self-emptying. But as regards this self-emptying, the author writes: "Self-emptying in the *Gita* is in the actions, not in a person; whereas the self-emptying in the New Testament is both in the person and in the actions of Jesus." (p. 131) Marking out this difference, the author notes: "Therefore in this comparative study, we see that the teachings on self-emptying and self-fulfilment in the *Gita* are only analogical to those in the New Testament." (p. 131).

The study is a valuable source for a comparative understanding of the central theme of the two Scriptures and its claims cannot be easily challenged, for the author claims only an analogical relationship between the teachings of the *Gita* and the New Testament.

· Thomas Kadankavil

C.S. Vyas, *Buddhist Theory of Perception*, New Delhi: Navrang, 1991, pp. viii + 180, Rs. 180.00

The subject - "Theory of Perception" falls in the scope of studies technically called "Pramāna Sastra" - epistemology. The function of Pramana Sastra in Indian philosophy is to establish criteria for and characteristics of knowledge so that we can set limits to what we can legitimately know and distinguish it from mere beliefs which are not proved to be true. Any evaluation of knowledge as right or wrong, valid or invalid, true or false is intrinsically linked with the question of the source or means of knowledge. The cornerstone of Pramāna Sastra is the premise that for each Piece of knowledge, there is some well-defined and accredited means - viz., perception (pratyaksha), inference (anumāna), comparison (upamāna), testimony (sabda) etc.

Scholars of different philosophical schools in India, upholding different metaphysical and esoteric standpoints have applied their best of minds in the field of epistemology, to strengthen their claims regarding - what is right knowledge and how this right knowledge leads to liberation. This effort to strengthen the experience with intellectual analysis and understanding has its roots in the hoary past of upanishads. Whatever be the date of Vedas/ (Principal) Upanishads (ten), the strands of thinking are quite clear - (1) A group which places the authority of Scripture (Word of God, Lord, Master - i.e., the Sabda authority) as primary, independent source for right knowledge. There appears to be no extra need of epistemological support for this self-manifested, self-sufficient authority. Epistemology at best can corroborate the stated experiences; but cannot contradict. (2) Another group, which rejects the authority of scriptures and reason as means of knowledge. This group lays stress on having a personal and direct experience of reality by practising techniques of meditation crowned by divine grace for the final deliverance. (3) Another group which holds that scriptures, reasoning, metaphysical speculation - all can lead independently and jointly the seeker to the ultimate knowledge of Reality. These are all paths, but goal is same. Therefore independent corroboration of the experience, goal, and path by reasoning and analysis has its immense value for the seeker of reality. This classification is a matter of emphasis and is not absolute.

Buddha appears to prefer the second view noted above - the empiricism as an epistemological point of view - (Ref. Majjima Nikāya - II - 211). The basis of religion must be after finding a final and ultimate insight in this life by gaining a higher knowledge personally of a doctrine among doctrines not traditionally heard of before." This stand of Buddha apparently emerged from the inability of his contemporaries who professed scriptural authority without having a direct experience of the scripture or the power to lead an aspirant to have the experience of spiritual truths in a direct way or logically convince Buddha about the supremacy of scriptural authority. Buddha's superior power of analytical and critical outlook backed by his personal experience enabled him to establish his viewpoint firmly about the nature of the world-objects, goal of life, the path to tread and the like. The teachings of Buddha, collected in various sutras forms the authentic Buddhist Scripture. The way Buddha taught Dharma has been summarised by Nagarjuna as follows: "Just as the grammarians make one read the grammar, the Buddha teaches Dharma according to the tolerance of the disciples. He teaches the Dharma to some people to refrain from sins, to some to accomplish virtue, to some to depend on dualism; and some to be independent of dualism; finally, to some, he teaches the profound awe inspiring practice of enlightenment, whose essence is compassion and voidness," (Ratnāvali - IV - ks - 94-96). From this we notice that various approaches and analyses are dependent on the level of the disciples understanding/ experiencing Dharma - the ultimate nature of all objects being Voidness.

This metaphysical stand is the critical cornerstone of Buddhist epistemology, and especially of the theory of perception. It goes to the credit of the great Buddhist logicians to-Nagarjuna, (c 150/300 A.D), Vasubandhu, Divinaga (c-400-500 AD), Dharmakirti (c-600-700) etc., to have elaborated on this issue in perfecting the definitions of Pratyaksha and Anumāna to fit in the framework of Buddha's teachings. This historic duration was the golden era of Buddhist logical supremacy, but also happened to have seen the decadence of Buddhism in a gradual way in India. Slowly, the Vedantic thinkers took over the field to firmly re-establish the authority of Vedas (scripture). Sri Sankaracharya delivered the final blow in this direction by propounding the Advaita philosophy. (Ref. Commentary on 1-1-1 to 4 sutras of Brahmasutras to re-establish the authority of Scriptures).

Historically, it is informed that Buddha himself did not enter into any sophistry of logical argumentations or authorship of works in this direction. Soon after Buddha's nirvana, the split took place in Sangha, each group laying importance on different aspects of Buddha's teachings. Nagarjuna (circa 150 BC/300 AD) is credited with the revival of Mahāyana tradition as well as the era of Buddhistic logic. This is the beginning proper of the Buddhist epistemology. The metaphysical cornerstones on which this is built, are- (1) The doctrine of momentariness, (2) the doctrine of Voidness, (3) no place for a supreme Lord Iswara in the system and (4) reasoning as the highest means of knowledge which is to corroborate experience.

With reference to these stands, the standard experiences of the following nature were taken up to develop the theories of perception and inference.

- I am seeing a blue pot on the ground;
This pot is the same pot I saw yesterday.
- I am happy; I am not happy.
- There is fire at the Mountain; because of smoke.

The analysis of these simple experiences differ from system to system of philosophers because their metaphysical hypothetical stands differ. These metaphysical stands are uncompromisable. Some of the major areas of differences in various systems of philosophy refer to these points; which also means the subsequent improvements will be in those areas only.

Nature of mind, nature of world objects, nature of intellect, nature of senses and ego, process of perception, nature of knowledge, nature of memory and other Samskāras, elements of which go to make knowledge-right or wrong.

According to Buddhist metaphysical stand, the explanation for each of these are modified. Those who do not accept the metaphysical stand of voidness as per Buddha, and adopt different set of metaphysical parameters (like permanence of world, the essential nature of all objects in world is Bramhan etc.) explain the same differently. Therefore any study of the epistemology, the developments in it and differences must

be clearly linked to the metaphysical hypothesis and parameters which the reasoning intends to uphold (or reject or modify). Shifts in metaphysical parameters is clearly based on the personal experiences and convictions about them where reason has very limited role to play.

The epistemological differences in viewpoints of the four Buddhist schools – ie., Yogācāra, Sautrāntika, Vaibhāshika, and Mādhyamika result due to the differing importance to the metaphysical parameters mentioned above, and the practical path adopted by them. The core of Buddhist epistemology is the establishment of perception proper as indeterminate in nature. This self-evident truism is essentially dovetailed to the imperativeness of a cogent explanation for the emergence of determinate knowledge and more specifically, perceptual judgement. The dispute over the nature of perception, the status of the external world and the nature of and validity of determinate perception is *inter alia* – an undisputed evidence of the importance the problem has in the history of philosophy. This was the hot topic of discussion for over 600 years between Buddhists and Naiyayikas during the period 500 AD–1100 AD.

The views of Buddhists on this topic with special highlighting of the contributions of Divināga and Dharmakīrti are ably presented in this work. If logic and epistemology are accepted as the essence of philosophy, we encounter here the invincible Buddhist stress on the analytical and critical approach blended with the experientialist *aperceue*, acute awareness of the ensnaring role of conceptualisation and language and above all the middle way steering clear of the subjective idealism of the *yogachara* and the direct realism of the *Vaibhāshika*. The need for the present special study – which is of a technical nature – is justified as there is no complete translation of the important work- “*Dharmakīrti-Pramana Vartika*” in English or other Indo-European languages.

The book has useful references, a selective translation of relevant *karikās* of Dharmakīrti’s *pramana vartika* with the original references, biography and index. The text could be made more useful in its future editions by incorporating some information on the following.

- a) The differences in the metaphysical parameters and stands of different schools of Buddhism and how it influences the theory of perception.

- b) The strike back by the Vedantins by attacking the metaphysical stand by reasoning to establish the authority of scriptures.
- c) A comparative contemporary study of Jain logic and Buddhist logical presentation about the theory of perception.

Dr. B. V. Venkatakrisna