

## BOOK REVIEWS

Norma H. Thompson, ed., *Religious Pluralism and Religious Education*, Alabama, Religious Education Press, 1988, pp. 330, \$ 14.95

The question of religious pluralism has become a common issue for all believers today. No one could live today without being conscious of the religion of his fellow countrymen, especially in the major cities in the world where the greatest mixtures of cultures are taking place. "The British have taken measures to include Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews, as well as Christians in their system of teaching religion in the schools, but there appears to be little indication that the churches, synagogues, and temples see a responsibility to participate in this educational process. For the most part, education in religion is seen as a function of the schools." (p. 9).

Religious education becomes a problem when we take the fact of religious pluralism seriously. Is it possible to work out a programme of religious education on the framework of the commonalities of all religious groups? Is there a religious education, theory and practice, that might be applicable to Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian education and all the others? If so, what are the distinctive elements which make it "religious" education? In order to pursue some discussion and thinking on the part of religious educators, this book was designed. In order to attain a wide spread of approaches and perspectives, representatives from different religious groups were invited to contribute their view of religious education in a religiously pluralistic society. The final chapter of the book discusses the problems and issues from an overall perspective with a view to provide a foundation for further discussions. It seeks solutions to the problems such as the following: "What implications can be drawn from the various discussions of the meaning of pluralism? What commonalities exist among the minorities groups, if any? Are the experiences of the ethnic minorities, of blacks, of women, of Jews, of the religions which we call "others," of such a group as the orthodox Christian, different enough that no overall pattern can be discerned? If a denomination is torn by pluralism within its own ranks, is it possible, and perhaps necessary, for the members of that denomination to relate to religions outside that group? What model for religious education theory and practice begins to emerge from these essays, or do we find no model emerging as satisfactory for many of these groups? (p. 5).

Though no definite answer is given to all these and other possible and related questions, the book high-lighted a very vital issue the religions are facing today, and so its relevance for our times is undeniable.

Ishan and Vempeny, *Krishna and Christ*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988, pp. 498, Rs. 110, \$ 20.00

The work is a doctoral dissertation in the field of the comparative study of religions. At a time when even the interreligious dialogue itself is suspected of prosletization intent, a study breathing the spirit of understanding and acceptance is certainly very opportune. This scholarly and reverential study of the personalities of Lord Krishna and Lord Christ in the light of some of the fundamental concepts and themes of the *Bhagavad gita* and the *New Testament* does substantiate the author's basic hypothesis that religions in their essential elements are not contradictorily opposed but complementarily related.

Reviewing the book Carls G. Valles writes: ". . . it (the present book) presents in an almost encyclopedic way the points in Christianity and Hinduism that can help in a comparative study of both. The approach is almost non-judgmental, full of respect and empathy for both views, discreetly pointing at the enrichment that each view can derive from the other, and warmly wishing that such process be accelerated for the benefit of all. The study is brought to a climax in the confrontation of the cross with the flute" (p. xxvii). Stretching the meaning of the symbols of Flute and Cross a little beyond their conventional signification, the author writes: "It must be remarked that in our study the primary element of the attitude to life represented by the flute is joy and that represented by the Cross is sorrow" (p. 378).

"Hinduism places the flute in Shri Krishna's hands, and to the question 'Why do I suffer?' answers, "Because you don't understand life." You take yourself too seriously, you take a too limited view of your individual self, you are too worried about your present birth, and so any trial looms large and any affliction becomes calamity. Take time out, gain perspective, listen to the divine melodies that broaden your outlook and enlarge your horizon, and suffering will be seen for the grain of sand it is on the shores of the universe" (p. xvii & xxviii). The flute has a cosmic dimension; it brings a new meaning to cross (suffering) and it makes the comparative study of *Krishna and Christ* refreshingly beautiful and enriching.

J.G. Arapura, *Hermeneutical Essays on Vedantic Topics*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986, pp. 207, Rs. 100/-.

The book contains eight articles on Vedantic topics such as sat (being), *maya*, Brahman and *sunyata*, *avidya* (ignorance), macro-micro cosmology, self-knowledge, *jivan-mukti* ideal and three articles on language. Some

general remarks about these essays may be in order. In the words of author himself, "these essays are mostly written from a comparative perspective." Yet in the title it is given "hermeneutical sayss," on the plea "that hemeneutics is to be perceived as that to which comparison itself leads." "The aim of these hermeneutical essays on various and sundry topics is the understanding of Vedanta, at least as much as in them lies to put it on its way. The topics themselves are nothing out of the way in as much as they are but normal foci of customary metaphysical discussions of this kind..." (p.3). The book is remarkable because of its special approach. "But they (the metaphysical topics) are approached in a rather different way from usual, that is in a manner which shows a leaning towards what the Greeks called *logos*, thus emphasizing an essential character of Vedanta constantly missed both in the mystical and rationalistic interpretations of that system" (p. 3). The book is a very valuable contribution in the field of Studies in Eastern religions and philosophies at a time when real academic interest in Vedanta has, paradoxically enough, waned.

## BOOK NOTICES

1. John Hick & Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a pluralistic theology of religions*, Faith meets faith series, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1987, pp.227. A new model of Christian theology, the pluralistic model, is taking shape, moving beyond the traditional models of exclusivism (Christianity as 'the only' true religion) and inclusivism (Christianity as 'the best' religion) toward a view that recognizes the possibility of many valid religions. In this volume, a widely representative group of eminent Christian theologians explores genuinely new attitudes towards other believers and traditions, expanding and refining the discussion and debate over pluralistic theology.

2. Leonard Swindler, ed., *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, Faith meets faith series, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 256. In this first book in Orbis new, Faith meets Faith series on interreligious dialogue, four of today's foremost Christian theologians (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John B. Cobb, Jr., Raimundo Panikkar, Hans Küng) address the concepts and problems of a universal theology of religion. Representatives from major religions respond creating a dialogue which faces the challenge of forging a global

view of human spiritual goals, while being faithful to the particularities of individual beliefs.

3. Haim Gordon and Leonard Grob eds., *Education for Peace. Testimonies from World religions*, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 240. The world's religions contain at their core the resources that are the most viable bases for peace education and peace making. *Education For Peace* discusses the role of interreligious intolerance in human conflict and the themes of peace in different religious traditions, and explores the possibility for true dialogue—between individuals and religions—to abate tension and lead to true peace. Practical aspects and problems of peace education theory and practice are also discussed.

4. Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God—Talk and the suffering of the Innocent*, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 136. "Gustavo Gutierrez theological reflections on the book of Job focus on the key issue of liberation theology, the problem of theodicy. How can one talk about God, about a God of justice, in the face of the sufferings of the innocent? Like Job, Gutierrez, seeks a way, not of solving that mystery, but of living in its depths."

#### Rosemary Ruether

5. Harold Coward, *Sacred Word and Sacred Text: Scripture in World Religions*, Orbis Books, 1988, pp. 222. This fascinating study of the world's sacred texts explains how the valuation of written scripture over the oral-aural experience is characteristic only of the recent western history. Even today it is a typical of how most believers experience scripture. *Sacred Word and Sacred Text* demonstrates how "Scripture historically has partaken of both the oral and the written traditions" and argues that, of the two, it is the oral word which has the greater power to transform lives.

6. John C. Cort, *Christian Socialism*, Orbis Books, 1988, pp. 402. This provocative and original work is the first full-scale study of Christian socialism, arguing that socialism *per se* is basically Christian. From the beginnings of the Judeo-Christian tradition through the present day, John Cort traces the ideas, events, and personalities which have shaped, and continue to shape, the Christian socialist movement.

7. Giles Cusson, *Biblical theology and the Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Mary Angela Roduit and George E. Ganss, trans. Gujarat Sahitya Prakash,

1988, XVI, 385, Rs. 55. \$ 10.50. This book bases its interpretation of St. Ignatius' *Exercises* chiefly on the biblical experience of salvation. It is, in many respects, the most extensive and best documented commentary on the *Exercises* presently available in English.

8. Hans Staffner, *Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1987, pp. 253.

This book deals with the question: is a genuine synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity possible? Various attempts of finding such a synthesis have been made in the course of the last 400 years. The author answers the question in his own characteristic way.

9. Bhagya Lakshmi, (compiled by), *Facets of spirituality: Dialogue and discourses of Swami Krishnananda*, Delhi. Motilal Banarsidass, 1986, pp. 292.

The book is a Kaleidoscopic profile of Swami Krishnananda in all his many manifestations as friend and companion to his disciples and as a philosopher of profound depth and wisdom. Here in these pages one finds the central truths of the *upanishadic* revelations commingled with sound pragmatic common sense and humane understanding of the problems that vex the heart and mind of man today.

10. Michael C. Brannigan, *Everywhere and Nowhere: The Path of Alan Watts*, American University Studies, New York, Peter Lang pub. 1988, pp. 194, \$ 33.

Brannigan gives us a systematic exposition of Alan Watts position and at the same time a critical evaluation that can help us understand the role he played in the meeting of East and West. More than any other person, Watts has inspired the continued widespread interest in Oriental thought. His interpretation of Eastern view-points, especially from Zen Buddhism, provides the background for his own unique philosophy, which centres around the quest for individual identity. His path demands the radical transformation from our fragmented ego-conscious state to genuine self-awareness.

11. X. Irudayaraj, ed., *Roots and Blossoms*, Dindigul, Beschi College, 1987, pp. 154.

The book is published in connection with the celebration of 150 years of Jesuit presence in Tamilnadu. To mark this celebration, *Roots and Blossoms* brings together nine scholarly articles giving an realistic picture of the new apostolic ventures and creative projects of the Jesuits in the Madurai Mission today.

12. Joe Mannath, *You Surprised Me*, Madras, Chair publications, 1987, Rs. 30, \$ 6. 95.

The message of the book is: "Come home meet yourself. Be ready to be surprised." Behind our dark moods and secret longings, among cobwebs of fear and doubt, are surprises waiting to happen – surprises that can sustain enthusiasm and hope. The book tells the story of this hidden surprises in us. It combines the insights of current psychology and counselling with modern mans spiritual search.

13. Clodivis Boff, *Feet-on-the-Ground Theology : A Brazilian Journey*, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 185.
14. Leonardo Boff, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 146.
15. Dominique Barbe, *Grace and Power : Base communities and Nonviolence in Brazil*, trans. John Pairman Brown, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 150.
16. Richard J. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles*, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 237.
17. Joseph G. Donders, *Liberation, the Jesus Mode*, Orbis Books, 1987.
18. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 99.
19. Pablo Richard, *Death of Christendoms, Birth of the Church*, Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 213.
20. Anand Amaladass, ed. *Jesuit Presence in Indian History*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988, p. 379.
21. C.M. Cherian, *Pondering God's word: Towards translating the gospel into life-experience*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1987, pp. xx. 204.
22. Carlos G. Valles, *Faith for Justice*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988, p. 175.
23. Angelo Fernandes, *The Christian Way Today*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988, pp. 189, Rs. 27, \$ 6.50.
24. Antony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog* Vol. 1 Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988, pp. Rs. 40/- and Vol. 2, 1989 pp. 280. Rs. 38, \$ 7.00

25. *Japji: Meditation in Sikhism*, trans. & Comm. by Swami Rama, The Himalayan Publishers Institute, Pennsylvania, 1987, pp. 88 Rs. 50/-
26. K.S. Duzzal, *Sikh Gurus: Their Lives and Teachings*, The Himalayan Publishers, 1987, pp. 253, \$ 9.95.
27. Kenneth A. Myers ed., *Aspiring to Freedom: Commentaries on John Paul II's Encyclical "The Social Concerns of the Church,"* Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1988, pp. 169, \$ 10.95.
28. Vinsent Nandi, *Model of Natural - Inclusivism*, Amsterdam, Stichting DNI Foundations, 1986.
29. Sri Anirvan, *Inner Yoga (Antaryoga)*, trans. from Bengali by Simanta Narayan Chatterjee, New Delhi, Voice of India, 1988, pp. 79, Rs. 40/-.