

BOOK REVIEWS

Sister Vandana

Nāma-Japa: Prayer of the Name in the Hindu and Christian Traditions

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1984, pp. 308, Rs. 40/-

The central theme of the book is based on the assumption that *Nāma* (name) and *Nāmi* (name holder) are not two or different from each other, but are one. The book draws its material from three traditions of the Divine Name: that of the Hindu, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Latin Western Church. It is interesting to note that *nāma sādhana* (spiritual practice of the name of God) has a striking similarity with "Jesus Prayer" in the Eastern Christian Tradition. Though the Israelites were forbidden to utter the name of their God Yahweh and Yahweh had to be referred to as "I am" (Ex 3:14), chanting the name of God was a holy practice in all the major world religions. The chanting of the syllable *Om*, the thousand names of Vishnu, and other innumerable *bhajans* and *mantras* in the name of Krishna or one's *istadevata* is a characteristic feature of Hindu spiritual *sādhana*. In the Indian tradition name or uttered word (*vaikhari*) is the outer expression of God Himself and is known as *Nāda-Brahma*. The recitation, therefore, of the Divine Name becomes a mystical bridge between the finite soul and infinite God. A similar practice is found in Eastern Christian spiritual tradition of Hesychasm and Jesus Prayer. The chief aim of this practice is to impress the name of Jesus on the heart, which symbolizes the most noble part of the human body, and the centre of spiritual life, love. Hesychasm is, therefore, ultimately a discovery of love of God in one's heart and the image of God therein. It aims at "internal stillness", tranquility and the consequent peace, by means of which one attains intimate union with God dwelling in one's heart. Islam also speaks of repeating the 99 beautiful names of God to attain communion with God.

Sister Vandana in her book *Nāma-Japa* gives quite an exhaustive account of this spiritual discipline which is predominant in various spiritual traditions. The book has three parts: beginning with practice in the first part, it proceeds to a discussion on the theoretical aspect in the second part, and concludes with a number of songs of representative saints drawn from all the great world religions in the third part. The author leads the reader directly to the practice of *Nāma-Japa* after

a short prefatory note and an introductory chapter on the purpose and mode of chanting the Divine Names. The account of the use of *mala* (rosary) for *Japa* (prayer), prayer through writing the Divine Names, prayer with music, rhythm, breath-awareness, words from the Scriptures present life itself, in and through prayer, as an enriching experience. The reasons given for considering *Nāma-Japa* superior to other forms of prayers seems to be convincing. "(1) The repetition of the Name, open to all irrespective of caste, age, sex, involves no injury to any living being. (2) It does not stand in need of any ancillary aid. (3) It does not require the intercession of any third person. (4) It can be practised at any time. (5) There are no restrictions in regard to place. (6) There are no ritualistic regulations." (p. 106). This had been the experience of innumeral Hindu, Christian and other saints such as Jnana Sambhandar, Namadev, Mirabai, Tulasidas, Guru Nanak, St John Chrysostom, St Bernard of Clairvaux and many others. The book is a spiritual manual, a veritable mine of invaluable information and instruction gathered from numerous authentic sources.

T. Kadankavil

Hal W. French & Arvind Sharma

Religious Ferment in Modern India

Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 185. Rs. 75/-

The book, written by two authors, offers a survey of all the significant movements and personalities dating from the beginning of British rule in India. The book has two parts: In the first part Dr. French explores and makes an assessment of the impact of the British economic interests, Utilitarian Philosophy and Christian missionaries and the Indian response which began with the reform movement of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo Samaj. The reform movements in different parts of the country, the Ramakrishna Movement, Vivekananda's mission, the Islamic response, the Buddhist renaissance and Indian nationalism are the areas examined in this section. The second part by Arvind Sharma describes the new patterns of relationship with the British in India, Nationalism and religion in modern Indian, the nationalist ideas of Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo and Gandhi, and other allied interests. He also focusses his attention on issues such as Hindu-Muslim rivalry and the growing drive for independence under the leadership of men like Tilak, Gandhi, Jinnah, Ambedkar etc., inspired by religious ideals. The last chapter is an overview of various

cross currents such as radical humanism, communism, secularism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam and new trends in Hinduism in the pre-independence decade in India. As a survey of the religious ferment in modern India the book is a mine of invaluable information.

Thomas K.

William Markby

Hindu and Mohammedan Law

Inter-India Publishers, New Delhi, First Pub. 1906; Reprint 1977.
Rs. 50/- pp. 172, Appendix, Index.

The administration of Hindu and Mohammedan laws in our times in India has its basis in Warren Hastings' Regulation (promulgated in 1772), which stipulated that "all suits relating to family life, marriage, inheritance, caste, and other religious usages and institutions", shall be governed by rules derived from the Hindu Law for Hindus and the Mohammedan Law for Mohammedans. Over the centuries these laws have undergone some significant modifications. William Markby offers vivid insights into two of the accepted systems of law in India. The content of the book is substantially a reprint of two articles originally written for the *Encyclopaedia Briannica*. The reader has to bear in mind that the book speaks of the state of affairs which prevailed at the dawn of this century. Though one cannot come to know the present practices by reading this book it is, however, a valuable source for acquainting oneself with the origins of the laws. The section on Hindu Law covers such areas as joint family, partition of the joint family estate, rights of property, wills, liabilities for debts, women's property, marriage, father-son relationship, and religious endowments etc. In the section on Muslim Law, the law of succession to property, marriage, divorce, legal position of Mohammedan women, guardianship, Shiah Law etc., are discussed. From the point of a comparative study of the laws of Hinduism and Islam the book could serve as a useful guide.

Thomas K.

Antony Fernando

Buddhism and Christianity, their Inner Affinity

Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, second ed. 1983, p. 133.

This small but significant book is the product of what is now known as ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. The book is inten-

ded as a guide for Christians engaged in the study of Buddhism. The World Fellowship of Buddhists Review describes this as a book that employs an ingenious method of bridge-building between seemingly contradictory teachings. The reviewer is also of the view that the author skilfully, dexterously and with remarkable ingenuity manages to bring about a reconciliation in a disarming and conciliatory manner. As the author himself puts it, "Without an extraordinary degree of openness, it is difficult for anyone to appreciate a book such as this which compares one religion with another, and what is more provocative still, tries to establish affinities between them (p. 1)". Affinity between religions, if it really exists, is a factor that could contribute largely to the cause of unity in a divided world. Hence a book of this sort, even at the risk of being misunderstood, is most welcome.

The book begins with a discussion on the Sermon on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The identity of the ethics of the two great world religions emerges as the author unfolds the fruits of his research, in spite of the seemingly irreconcilable metaphysics of Christianity and Buddhism. Who in his right mind can dare say that the noble Eightfold Path forms no part of his practical religion. It has universal affinity with all religions. Even if the view that there is affinity between the Buddha and Christ on human liberation does not stand the scrutiny of the scholars, the book is a success in establishing the inner affinity of Christianity and Buddhism in the area of ethical life.

Cardinal Suenens

Open the Frontiers

London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980, pp. 124, t 2.95.

This book is a spiritual testimony resulting from Cardinal Suenens' interview with Karl Heinz Fleckenstein, a German journalist. Though the present work is autobiographical in nature, it is much more than just biographical and personal details. The central message of the book is that the theological speculations on the faith-content of any religion is to be coupled with day to day living of it, constantly adapting it to the changing circumstances.

The value of the book is enhanced by the personal testimony of the author's God-experience which helps him to encounter God in the day to day life of men: to read Him in the faces of the people he meets, to hear Him in the voices of the people who talk to Him

Paul Achondy

Richard Fox Young

Resistant Hinduism

University of Vienna, 1981, pp. 200.

The book deals with a very specialized subject, namely, resistant Hinduism as it is found in the Sanskrit sources on anti-Christian apologetics in the early nineteenth century in India. The present volume is included as the eighth in the De Nobili Research Library series edited by Prof. Gerhard Oberhammer. The central theme of the work is Hindu apologetics. Apologetics is a term generally associated with that branch of systematic theology which tries to defend Christian dogmas against its adversaries by scriptural argumentation and such other means. It is interesting to note that apologetics formed an essential part of the classical works in Hinduism on religion and philosophy, though it was meant not so much for defending religion as for reputation of rival systems. Though the tradition of inter-religious dialogue was neglected, there is no lack of literature on intra-religious argumentations in Hinduism.

Richard F. Young identifies a collection of literature which strictly comes under the scope of apologetics. The first book of this sort in Sanskrit was *Mataparikṣa* (MP) (An Examination of Religions) by John Muir, a Scottish civil servant and Orientalist, written in 1839. It aroused the interest and indignation of three conservative pandits who started a full-scale controversy. The treatises written in criticism of Muir were the following: in 1839, the *Mataparikṣāśikṣa* (MPŚ, A Lesson for the (Author of the) *Mataparikṣa*), written by Somanātha; in 1840 the *Mataparikṣottara* (MPO, An Answer to the *Mataparikṣa*), written by Harachandra Tarkapancānana, and in 1844/1845 the *Sas-tratattvavinirṇaya* (STV, A Verdict on the Truth of the *śāstra*) by Nilakaṅṭha Goreh (or Gore). The introductory chapter outlines the context and the orientation of the research. The second and third chapters place the MP controversy in its historical perspective, especially the dialogues of William Carey and William Hodge Mill. Chapter four makes a probe to reveal all the facts about the participants in the MP controversy. The subject-matter of chapter five is confined strictly to apologetics. "The issues debated were, for the most part, ones that are found in text-books describing the fundamental doctrines of either religions, with the curious absence of Jesus Christ, Christianity's central figure" (p.175). One of the central concerns of

the book is to "assess to what extent the pandits resisted or accommodated Christianity. Any encounter between religions may involve a continuum of postures, ranging from extreme hostility to liberal attempts at coming to terms with mutual co-existence by means of syncretism, inclusivism, some form of the idea of the equality of religions etc. These stances emerge as religions are processed through apologetical frame-works. 'Resistance', then, means intellectual opposition to presuppositions at variance with one's own, whether religious, philosophical, or cultic. 'Accommodation' means an attempt to adapt to or reconcile the content of Hinduism with Christianity, whether or not this is done in such a way as to preserve continuity with tradition. Naturally, accommodation of the opposite variety . . . is also pertinent." (p. 16). The fifth chapter takes up these complex problems and discusses them with the detachment of a scientific research scholar. The sixth and final chapter concentrates on the problem of religious pluralism. The epilogue describes the changes that took place in the personal life of the two participants, namely, John Muir and Nilakanṭha Goreh. The author also presents a short summary at the end.

One thing which strikes us when we peruse the book is that the attitude of openness and the recognition of religious plurality did not come about easily and suddenly in modern Hinduism. Resistance instead of accommodation, was the rule rather than exception. Yet even in the heat of controversy one could see an authentic inter-religious encounter. The concluding observation of the author that "the participants were loyal to their own *Dharma* and tried intelligently and honestly if not sympathetically to come to grips with each other" (p. 176) has to be accepted as the leading light in any future inter-religious dialogue.

Thomas Kadankavil

Bowman L. Clarke & Eugene T. Long (eds)

God and Temporality

New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1984, pp. 188.

All but one of these essays, the essay of Milic Capek, were read at a meeting on "God: The contemporary discussion", held at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1983 and sponsored by the New Ecumenical Research Association. In Western Philosophy, especially at the end of the nineteenth century, the discussion on God centred around His transcendence and immanence. While the term transcendence indicated

the otherness of God to the world, to His absolute priority to created entities, the term immanence stood for His active presence in creation. When the attention was focussed on the otherness of God and the infinite qualitative difference between God and the World, the emphasis was on the asymmetrical relation between them. "In recent discussions, a more organic understanding of the relation between God and his creatures seems to be at the forefront of discussions concerning the concept of God." (p.IX). This new trend is the concern of the essays in this volume.

In all there are nine essays which fall into two parts, and a general Introduction. The title *God and Temporality* was chosen for this group of essays, rather than the title *God and Time* because, as the editor puts it, the term 'temporality' has a far richer connotation than the term 'time' and suggests all the concrete conditions of temporal existence. Each essay in the first part takes a simple issue such as God's love, historicity, responsibility for sin, suffering, and feminine images of God and urges the reader to take more seriously God's involvement in temporality, particularly human temporal existence. In the second part the philosophy of certain thinkers like Heidegger, Royce, Bergson and Whitehead are discussed in the context of God's involvement in human temporality. Where to locate the divinity in the three possible levels of temporal involvement, namely, minimum or maximum involvement or in-between, is a problem which will remain unsolved for ever, stirring up the inquisitiveness of every searching mind.

Tomy G. Karottukizhakayil

Dorothee Sölle

(*Trans. Rita and Robert Kimber*)

Of War and Love

Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1983, XIV+178 pp. \$7.95.

Dorothee Sölle is wholly opposed to war. Born, bred and brought up in Germany, she loves her country indeed and yet feels disgusted and sad that Germany was unwilling to say 'no' to the first two world wars. What is true of Germany is also true of every other country. Under the pretence of defence, we in fact stir up war against an apparent enemy as yet very distant. We are all peace-lovers and not

peace-makers. The former is a kind of passive acceptance whereas the latter implies our active involvement. It is time we start doing something to stop war and create peace.

“The house of the man-eater Ogre”, describes our attitude towards war. So long as I am safe I do not care what happens outside my compass and am indifferent to the miseries outside. I support it provided I am paid well. It is only when war seems to threaten me, do I begin to act defending me. Germany refused to say no when America wanted to station missiles in the country. Driven by a love of mankind and for all forms of life the author opposes war and says that our defensive weapons are in fact offensive weapons.

What we need today is not passive harmless onlookers, but active and constructively harmful participants by whom alone the present terrifying conditions can be eradicated. Women also have a significant role in bringing about peace in a world prone to violence. The author's intense desire and effort is to see the world united in the love of Jesus who lived without weapons and stirred up a revolution in the hearts of millions. There are countries like India which uphold moral values fervently. The strong community feeling, family ties, respect for elders, parents and teachers, sacredness of marriage etc. are some of the major values of India. Only when men begin to respect these ideals, a revolution of the heart can take place. Dorothee Sölle's ideas are revolutionary in character. But what is advocated in the book is a constructive evolution and criticism. It inculcates a sense of responsibility in the reader and provokes one to action along the lines indicated above.

Sr. Mary John, S.Sp.S.