

Douglas A. Fox,

Mystery and Meaning,

Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, 190pp. \$4.95.

The book bears the subtitle: "Personal Logic and the Language of Religion." The book consists of an introductory chapter and three parts. The first part is entitled "The Context of Theology"; the second part deals with "The Language of Theology"; and the third part is "Toward a Dialogical Theology".

In the first chapter, the author bemoans the lack of organized thinking among the clergy as well as the laity with respect to Christian religion and proceeds to suggest a way of viewing Christian thought that will bring "some order, as well as some critical and constructive thrust to our thinking" (p. 13).

He argues that theology is not the starting point of religion. The usual sequence in the development of any religion, he suggests, consists first in an intense *experience* or awareness in some person. It is this experience that constitutes the genesis of a religion. Next arises a *tradition*, around this initial experience, which tries to describe it. Finally, arises a *theology*, a rigid system of thought justifying the experience and tradition (pp. 19-20).

In the second chapter he gives the reasons for difficulties which arise in defining the term religion. Belief in God cannot be said to be the characteristic feature of a religion because there is Buddhism which is a great world religion which does not subscribe to the view that God created this world. Nor can religion be looked upon as something belief in some transcendent reality because many forms of piety hold that truth and reality are within us (p. 25). What then constitutes the essence of religion? The author asserts that the core of religion consists in the immediate experience which illumines the whole of existence and which gives a profound value to our life and makes it meaningful (p. 26). Thus, the core of religion is an experience. Religion is not something that is arrived at by a logical process. And religious experience generates an "awakening", a new way of looking at the world and its problems. The author calls this the *Central Generating Experience of Religion* and claims that Christianity arose from the awakening to Christhood by Jesus. On p. 31 he has drawn up a chart to show how this central generating experience in its inter-action with the environment gives rise to representation through myths and rituals, to ethics and moral ideals, to a

church or a religious group and, finally, leads to philosophy and theology.

In the third chapter, which he calls "Thinking about the unthinkable", he shows the intellectual difficulty in thinking about God—something beyond conceptualization, yet something within the experience of some persons. He frankly declares that "God cannot be proven" (p. 38). Still, he shows that it is necessary to think about God. Fox writes "But while thought can never fully comprehend and describe the unique wholeness of God, it remains necessary for us to think, since to fail to do so would be to abdicate a role and responsibility that God himself had presented to us in our evolution as thinking animals" (p. 39 f). The great problem of religion is "to account for a real transcendent infinite Divine Being who is different from an equally real universe" (p. 42). It is this difficulty that has given rise to various kinds of religions and various kinds of theology.

He explores this problem in the second part of the book "The Language of Theology". Both language and logic, like experience, consist of the duality of subject and object. But according to Monism there is the all-inclusive oneness of Being. However, religion as well as Dualistic thought recognize the reality of the person.

Nevertheless, Fox asserts that even the relationship between persons has no suitable language since language, being dualistic, is also objectivistic (p. 53).

Another difficulty arose as a result of Descartes. He affirmed that because man thinks, he exists. Thus Descartes made thought the essence of selfhood, and separated the self from all objects and other selves. This gave rise to the great philosophical problem, the explanation of "the reality of the other". So Fox asserts that the problem is to find a way of thinking and speaking which overcomes the formal separation of subject and object.

Fox refers to the postulates of John Macmurray in his two volumes *The Self as Agent* (1957) and *Persons in Relation* (1961). According to Macmurray, percepts are the creation of relationships and concepts are the important ways of extending the relationship out of which the percepts have arisen. Secondly, Macmurray starts with the basic postulate "I do" rather than Descartes's "I think" and in the place of the isolated subject "I", he speaks of "you and-I". That is, Macmurray conceives the self as being primarily the agent or the doer and not as the subject. This is in line with the development of the child. The child responds to the other

long before he 'thinks'. So it is asserted that philosophy and its language must also start with life and response. Fox shows that more than two thousand years ago, Buddhist philosophers insisted that consciousness always requires an object to awaken it to action. But, a Macmurray has shown, action is not a mere reflex action or a mere habit. Genuine action is *intentional action*. It involves *choice*. That means, action requires not only a *agent* but also *knowledge*. Also the birth of "self-consciousness" depends on the birth of "other-consciousness". Thus, the logic of relationship also involves the logic of the personal, and Fox deals with the problem of the logic of the personal in the fifth chapter.

A *dialectic* starts with two terms which are partial experiences of the truth and give rise to a third term, the synthesis which is more nearly a complete expression of the truth. A *paradox* starts with two terms which seem to contradict each other. According to Fox, both these logical forms are inadequate to express the truth. The logic of the personal, Fox asserts, is well expressed by the term *contraplete* suggested by Buckham (*The personalist*, Vol. 26 1945). It indicates that the terms stand in some sense over against each other, yet need each other for a statement of the complete truth. The form of the personal, according to Fox, is neither a dialectic which requires a synthesis nor a paradox with two apparently unresolvable, yet mutually necessary terms. On the other hand, the logical form of the personal recognizes the duality of the personal or relational truth. A personal proposition will be found to contain two contrapletes which do not negate each other and which do not need to be resolved into a new synthesis. The two contrapletes together constitute the truth. For example, the two terms 'love' and 'hate' are highly relational and personal terms. Fox uses the analysis of these two personal relationships as given by Erich Fromm in his book *Art of Love* (1956). The contraplete of love is judgment. Love without judgment results in infatuation. It is blind. It is the love of an image and not of a person. Hatred is a symptom of fear. The contraplete of love is not fear. The statement "I love you" implies "I judge you" and also that in part and at times "I shall hate you."

In the final part, Fox turns to an examination of theological statements on the basis of the logic of the personal and the language of relationship since theology is predominantly concerned with *personal truths*. In this part he examines the difficulties which arise out of the concepts permanence *Us* change, being *Us* becoming Unity *Us* plurality, unity *Us* particularity, and so on. Is God characterized by Being or Becoming or both? These are

the problems which confronted the ancient Indian thinkers. While the Monists of the Upanishadic times were propounding the theory of Being, Buddha propounded the theory of Becoming as the ultimate. Fox illustrates these controversies by referring to Theravada Buddhism and the Advaita of Samkara. If God is thought of as Being, the world has either to be ignored or looked upon as illusory. To see Reality as one is to do injustice to our experience of multiplicity.

Fox asks whether these qualities are in conflict. He tries to use *dialogic* to unravel these tangles. God is Being. God is also Becoming for we never experience being as such. We never experience anything which does not undergo change. So Fox concludes that God is really best thought of as Being-Becoming. The reality we experience is the contrapletal relation of the two. It is really the whole, the contrapletal one including being as well as becoming, unity as well as plurality, unity as well as particularity, and so on.

Next he takes up the problem of Jesus the Christ, the concrete universal. Jesus the man had the generating Experience, the awakening. Such awakening, Fox concedes, is possible in many persons, in many places, at many times. But he argues that the essential faith of Christianity is that the experience of Jesus is one and unique. There is nothing like it in anyone, anywhere else. This is a case of personal logic. To call Jesus "the Christ" is to say that the experience is unique and shakes all the disciples out of mere routine patterns of thought and life. As regards the problem of his birth he says that being "born of a virgin" may be untrue in the case of Jesus the man. But it is true in the case of Christ. It is symbolical (p. 121). Similarly, with respect to the problem of resurrection, Jesus may have been buried, "but the Christ, the divine act of invitation to mankind, is eternally present in God even after the moment of its temporal concretion in Palestine is ended" (p. 122). Fox asserts, "So the Christ, understood dialogically, breaks confining illusion of lifeless eternity and static perfection and allows God to be seen continually fulfilled and fulfilling Reality, moving in us all" (p. 133).

Applying this logic to faith and doubt, he shows that to doubt is to be human, to be alive. To abandon doubt is not to achieve truth but to ignore the fact that we and all our experiences are fragmentary. Faith without doubt leads to fanaticism (p. 146). It has been seen above that love without judgment leads to infatuation.

Thus, this book is a very remarkable analysis of religion which is essentially a matter of personal experience. Confusion, untruth and fanaticism arise when this basic aspect of religion is ignored and emphasis is laid on mythology, rituals and theology which are all mere encrustations. True religion is an experience. It is personal. Thus he fulfils the task he set for himself, namely, to suggest "a critical and constructive thrust to our thinking" on religion.

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Albrecht Frenz (Ed.)

Grace in Saiva Siddhānta

Vedānta, Islam and Christianity

Madurai: Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Arasaradi,
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The Seminar held at Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Arasaradi, Madurai, in October 1971 concentrated on the Study of "Grace" in various Religions. Specialists in various religions came together, shared their views, discussed many aspects of grace and arrived at a comprehensive concept of "Grace as viewed by Saiva Siddhānta, Vedānta, Islam and Christianity." It is to the credit of Dr. Albrecht Frenz, that the proceedings of the seminar have been made available to us. That grace has been operating throughout the seminar becomes abundantly clear when one reads this book.

The first two papers by S.P. Annamalai and V.A. Devasenapati give us an idea of grace as conceived in Saiva Siddhanta literature. Grace is presented as *guru-arul* and *tiru-arul*, especially in the initial poems of the first eight *Tirumurais*. The personified concept of grace is not alien to Saiva Siddhanta. The bestowal of grace, the process of sublimation, the consequent effects of sublimation, the concept of obscuration, a comparative idea of *karma and grace*, the co-operation and operation grace and human endeavour, these and other such live issues are discussed as dealt with in Saiva Siddhanta literature. From the third paper we get a brief and precise idea of grace as it was understood by the Vedantic Writers. The paper deals with the perennial problem—the causes for the malady and misery of man, and even suggests the ways and means to get rid of these miseries. It is very appropriately