

BOOK REVIEW

William Sweet, *Religious Belief: The Contemporary Debate* (Dharma Endowment Lectures Series No. 6), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, pages vii+168, ISBN: 81-86861-57-2.

This number of Dharma Endowment Lectures Series, by William Sweet, caters to the rational-religious wonderments and responses of most of today's seriously reflective believers, atheists, philosophers and students of philosophy and religion alike. The pen belongs to a really serious thinker with a wide-ranging academic exposure, teaching experience, solid published works, editorships and associate editorships of, at least, four scholarly journals in philosophy, religion and culture, and editorship of the 20-volume *The Collected Works of Bernard Bosanquet*. His recent works and interests are in human rights, culture, pluralism, metaphysics, science, religion, Husserl, Stein and Maritain.

The work under review (1) surveys contemporary philosophies of religion, (2) questions the "consistent failure to recognize the complexity of religious practice and the point ... of religious belief," (3) identifies the problems involved here as their logical positivist and analytical reductionist stance, and (4) works out a rationally tenable non-reductionist way of discovering the meaning and meaningfulness of religious beliefs as a whole, and, in particular, beyond their apparently cognitive nature. The book is a condensed and well-argued rendering of contemporary debates in the philosophy of religion from the linguistic analytical and religious pluralistic perspective, not from the phenomenological or ontological.

Sweet smoothly steers clear of the logical empiricist anti-religious and/or cognitive religious elements in Flew, Hare, Mitchell, Philips, Plantinga, Nielsen, Hick, and others. Along with Mitchell, Sweet discovers the cognitive content of religious belief. He gives a short but clear evaluation (1) of Hick's principle of "lack of rational doubt" as verification tool for religious beliefs and assertions, (2) of his theory that veracity of these assertions depends on the subject matter and the actions that follow, and (3) of his falsification theory that says that "something can be meaningful, and possibly verifiable, even if not falsifiable" (21).

Of all the Hickian proofs for religious beliefs, the one that most satisfies the anthropomorphist believer (whom *all* these thinkers seem to like most!) seems to be the principle of eschatological verification, whereby one is, at least, hopeful of verification of the very meaning of life at the end times as against the total lack of such hopes in the life of one for whom life has no final ends. The exact reason why *we* say it satisfies mainly the anthropomorphist believer is the following. Eschatological verification for such has to be a specific experience at the end times. But the very question whether there are going to be such cognitively too separable experiences at the end times is itself to be verified eschatologically by the theistically anthropomorphist believer, whereas a pantheist (e.g., St. Paul) would have a widely different experience to expect. Not that he would not expect experiences, but he would have to expect, beyond serialized experiences, a relatively general, wholesome, integral and continuous stream of experience(s) that naturally imply also a related version of the above-mentioned verification.

But if we were to sanctify theistic-anthropomorphic expectations as 'real', as against wide approximations to the holistic, integral and continuous, then we do not do justice even to the very more informed theistic and anthropomorphist tenets of religion on questions such as the nature of God, the nature of time and space at the divine realm, etc. As Sweet himself asks, "How could a finite human being ever confirm belief in the existence of such an infinite being?" (24).

He comes to the question of belief, its meaning and origin through a well-argued trip through but beyond Flew, Plantinga *et al.*, on the one hand, and through the thoughts of Wittgensteinian fideists like D. Z. Philips, on the other— commendably within the limited space of Chapters 1 and 2. The debilitating hunch of Wittgensteinian fideism advocated by D. Z. Philips is found to be the non-recognition of the fact that, although one grows from childhood by just growing into fundamental beliefs, religious beliefs need not be fundamental beliefs, and that these beliefs need not always remain rationally unjustified. Sweet brings this point to the fore and tries to solve it. He argues with them all, that religion has an expressive character and that belief has both internal and external criteria for verity. Thus, he unmasks Philips' view that religious belief is a purely private affair and has no epistemological commonality with rational and

other beliefs, by referring to the origin and development of religious belief from outside of actual persons. In the same vein, he calls for and attempts solutions for the impasse caused by Wittgensteinian fideist "uni-dimensional non-cognitive" and subjectivistic (54) reduction of religious belief. He suggests a way that starts with epistemological, intercultural and interreligious transcendence of cultural relativism and leaves "the world as it is" (chapters 3, 4). We should, therefore, look for the foundations of religious belief "as a whole." Sweet concludes in chapter 3 that just as religious belief has recourse to some foundational truths or beliefs, so, too, do all anti-foundationalists, including Kai Nielsen who vehemently rejects foundationalism and, curiously enough, rests his basic arguments on some foundational criteria of validity!

The first three chapters are really basic to those who would like to get a thorough feel of what is going on in the philosophy of religion. From chapter 4 onwards the discussion gets serious, and their reading will be most rewarding, too. Thus, for example, half the book, say, up to page 88, the reader is being prepared to take a plunge into fundamental questions in religious belief and religious epistemology; and, thereafter, Sweet discusses rational ways of solving basic challenges posed by contemporary critics of religious belief. Although the conclusions of the final chapter allows direct comprehension and makes a satisfactory reading for the initiated, the less initiated student of philosophy of religion would do well to read the whole book for full appreciation and for deriving great profit for his/hers intellectual understanding and practice of religious faith and commitment.

Now, to comment on chapters 5 and 6 is to take the freedom also to suggest a few more desiderata to the existing chunk of highly cogent but analytical arguments and conclusions. To make it more useful for the reader, the author could have brought in a few chapters on the thoroughly probabilistic nature of all possible definitions of man's beliefs and of all that man utters in a propositionally descriptive and analytical manner. And treating of the futility of simplistic phenomenology of religion as problem solver would have added to the usefulness of the book. This would have given greater credibility to his arguments in chapters 5 and 6!

After the chapter on Reformed Epistemology, there is a well-deserved room for one on propositional-objective perception and 'theoria'

perception. The latter would bring out ways of forming basic beliefs regarding man, the cosmos and the Divine at the dimension of their ontological interface. As rationally tenable varieties of mysticism (deeply religious faith, experience and expression) would show, this alone is, properly speaking, genuine faith (belief) and genuine perception (experience). In that case, such an additional chapter would have contributed further in settling the issue of propositional beliefs the book very much grapples with. Thus, the paradox of immediately triggered beliefs and "putatively serious" beliefs engendered by "cognitive malfunction" could very well have been shown off or transcended by substitution of the former with an ever more universally and probabilistically sensitive experience as the criterion for formation of "properly basic beliefs" – that result from more and more universally and probabilistically sensitive *states* of mind, life, attitudes and experiences (see the first few sub-sections in chapter 4) within the context of the ultimately relational aspect of "All That Are." This is mystic faith that extends the concept of 'works' into that of the nexus of universal consciousness and universally loving action. This is the most genuine aspect and test case of religious belief not touched upon by the book.

For anyone interested in the rational, linguistic and commitment aspects of religious faith, this book is a necessary reading. Most parts of the chapters, especially of the last two, busy themselves with countering or partially agreeing with what the many contemporary philosophers of religion have suggested. But the reader does also expect a more tenable philosophy of religious faith from the pen of a philosopher with so broad-based a formation and so distinguished a record of well-researched works. So, the final chapter could have been more elaborate. The question of the final object of religious belief in its ontological (not just formal, cognitive and action-related) connection with human life on earth remains to be worked out, based on the ontological and cosmological aspects of the question of God, without which the very elemental issue of the cognitive aspect of all religious faiths remains an enigma.

Now, what has happened is that Flew, Hare, Mitchell, Philips, Plantinga, Nielsen and Hick, like positivist and empiricist thinkers, and Sweet himself, forget the fact that religious belief is based on ontologically formed religious attitudes, which, in turn, is, in fact, based on (1) Reality-

in-total and (2) experiences that purport to generalize Reality-in-total, because religion is based not merely on specific subjectivities but on humans' subjectively objective appropriations of humanity, the cosmos and the Divine (if there is such a pole to Reality). Sweet is busy with the anthropological bases of belief and not that which lies beyond, i.e., not with the ontological structures that cause and justify belief. That is, we need, not merely a linguistic, analytic, pragmatic, phenomenological or hermeneutic philosophy of religion, but an ontological one that subsumes all other points of view. When the engagement of Reality (not merely of the Divine) and the ensuing experience, and consequent religious utterance and action are recognized as fundamental, an ontological philosophy of religion emerges. The commonly alleged absolute difference between (1) emotively positive, cognitively null religious experience, belief, utterance, scriptures and discourse, and (2) cognitively verifiable or falsifiable scientific statements would vanish on the basis of their cosmological and ontological foundations. Infusion of Enlightened Consciousness or Silence and its effect in such thinking becomes necessary. The level of Silence in thought does not mystify but improves the truth probability of religious and scientific utterances under the point of view of Reality-in-total. There results, thus, an ontology of scientific and religious realities, and also of such utterances, wherewith any absolute distinction between the two becomes adumbrated anti-holism.

The thinkers discussed take for granted the phenomenon of belief merely in their observable actuality, but why not consider also its more and more genuine universalistic expressions, wherein philosophically more and more tenable Wisdom (belief) is mixed with Commitment (universally conscious and loving action) wherewith one tends more towards actively religious love? "Philosophically more and more tenable Wisdom" represents not merely religious belief but belief in general, that is at the roots of all cognition and action. Commitment tends to intensify and generalise the intensions of the agent. Here, action follows, which, along with the depth of consciousness and intention, determines the extent of rational tenability of beliefs and religious commitment of persons. Propositions regarding formation of such wisely tendentious actions and the consequent emotive-cognitive states of consciousness, in more and more ideal cases of wisely religious persons, are mainly ontologically analysable propositions. They are linguistically analysable only within the

super-structural framework of ontological synthesis and analysis proper to it! So, we need an ontological science of religion to accomplish this feat.

Sweet and no other thinker that he studies in the book are seen advancing the concept of the religious person's trust in God beyond theoretically anthropomorphic beliefs and truths. Typically, anthropomorphic trust has to be typified as truth in an infinitely and universally active Divine, within infinitely universalistic creation and experience of the cosmos by the Divine and in a finitely universalistic creation and experience of the cosmos by men in communion. Insofar as this is not treated of, Sweet, too, belongs to the same school as his predecessors belong!

He has succeeded in basing beliefs in moral and religious action, sure. However well "belief that" is based in "belief in," and the cognitive aspect is, thus, supplemented with the active side, there still remains the question as to what the generalities are, that express themselves in the religious (cognitive and active) faith of individuals and peoples.

The final chapter is also very helpful for those who contribute to the growth of theology, religious studies, interreligious dialogue, spiritual exercises etc. It discusses also the place of reason in all these – a reason why the final chapter is to be recommended to *Charismatics* as well! As mentioned already, the initiative against religious reductionism that Sweet proposes could have been pushed to its broader conclusions, by including in the complex phenomenon of religious belief, not merely the linguistic, social-contextual, multi-religious and psychological environment of specific religious beliefs and of religious belief "as a whole" but also the strains that ingress into the phenomenon of religious belief from beyond media i.e., from the whole cosmos and from Reality-in-total. This would help produce a cosmology and ontology that support the phenomenon of religion from beyond the purely cognitive and social realms. It would, then, serve sentimentalist and intellectualist perversions of religion to revamp by integration! The final chapter would, then, demand a sequel, a second volume: *The Cosmology and Ontology of Religious Belief: The Contemporary Debate*! If belief is affected by its surroundings, as Sweet admits (130), then why not inquire into what general elements of surroundings ingress into beliefs? Only a study and integration of these elements into religious faith can, in fact, advance the cause of rational

explication of faith in a manner adequate to the phenomenon of religion and life in this universe.

Raphael Neelamkavil

Michael Fallon, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1997, Indian reprint, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation (ATC), 2002, pages 395, ISBN: 81-7086-278-7; *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, 1997, Indian reprint, Bangalore: ATC, 2002, pages 293, ISBN: 81-7086-279-5; *The Gospel according to Saint Luke*, 1997, Indian reprint, Bangalore: ATC, 2002, pages 375, ISBN: 81-7086-280-9; *The Gospel according to Saint John*, 1998, Indian reprint, Bangalore: ATC, 2002, pages 386, ISBN: 81-7086-281-7.

The author is well known in Australia, Israel, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand through his lectures and writings on Sacred Scripture. He has made significant contributions to biblical literacy not only in these countries but in other countries, too. These "Introductory" commentaries on the four Gospels are a completely revised and enlarged edition of his earlier one volume commentary on the four Gospels, *The Four Gospels: An Introductory Commentary*, which was published first in Australia in 1980, and then in the USA.

The Christian readers of India are really privileged to have access to the low priced Indian reprints of these four volumes on the Gospels. Unlike the other commentaries, these volumes give the full Gospel text in the narrow column of each page and the commentary part in the wider column. Where the commentary extends beyond the page on which the text is given, the following pages are given over to the commentary. This arrangement helps the reader to refer the text and commentary simultaneously. Another advantage of this commentary is that if a particular text has parallels in other Gospels, those references are given underneath the text-column. An important characteristic of this commentary series is that the author has *italicized* the word(s), phrase(s),

or passage(s), which are unique to one particular Gospel, and which have no parallels in other Gospels. This is a great hermeneutical help to the reader to understand the theological nuances of the Evangelists, especially of Matthew and Luke, by observing how they amend, omit, or rearrange the Marcan text, which is generally accepted by biblical scholars as the first Gospel to be written down. The biblical text that this series has taken is from *The New Revised Standard Version*.

Since the author wants that each of the four volumes is to "be complete on its own," the reader may find that the commentary given on certain texts in one Gospel is repeated, often verbatim, in the parallel texts in other Synoptic Gospels, which the author himself has acknowledged in the Preface. This desire to see each volume complete on its own might have motivated the author to repeat the same topic "Introducing the Gospels," running to 15 pages, in all the four volumes at the very beginning. This introductory chapter certainly provides the ordinary reader with some hermeneutical clues as to how the Gospels are to be approached critically and scientifically. Then the author introduces each Evangelist, his characteristic approach to Jesus, the main character of the Gospel story, and his own theological perspectives. It is noteworthy that the author gives an elaborate and scientific introduction to *the Gospel according to Saint John*, highlighting the theological richness of the Gospel. In each Gospel an elaborate structure is given. Each major section of the Gospel begins with a short introductory comment, which situates that section in the context of the preceding section, and this helps the reader to follow the thread of the story easily. In view of those who are using this commentary series to prepare liturgical celebrations, the author has also given an appendix in each volume listing the Gospel passages in the lectionary.

These commentaries in the series are very useful for those who are "interested in a prayerful reading and reflection" of the Gospels. **Matthew** presents Jesus as the promised Messiah in whom all the Old Testament prophecies find their perfect fulfilment. The Evangelist gives more emphasis to the teaching of Jesus. This is why we find five long discourses in the Gospel: the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), the Mission discourse (chapter 10), the Parable discourse (chapter 13), the Community discourse (chapter 18), and the Eschatological discourse

(chapters 24-25). These speeches give us "many insights into the mind and heart of Jesus, and also into what it means to be Jesus' disciple." According to the majority opinion of scholars, **Mark's** is the earliest of the four Gospels. In comparison with Matthew and Luke, Mark gives more emphasis to the deeds of Jesus; that is why we find 18 miracles narrated in this shortest of all the Gospels. Since Mark has written his Gospel to the persecuted Christians of Rome, and since he wants to encourage those in their sufferings, he presents Jesus as the suffering Son of Man who also has undergone similar sufferings, like persecution, misunderstanding, even from his own disciples, and, finally, martyrdom at the hands of the Jewish authorities. According to Mark, any understanding of Jesus that does not take into account the reality of the cross is in the end a false understanding of his person. "The message of Jesus' love, given so unforgettably on the cross, could inspire Jesus' disciples to continue to live as Jesus had lived." The author of the third Gospel is **Luke** who is generally understood by scholars as a Gentile convert from Antioch of Syria. He is a sensitive observer of the events he describes. He is interested in both history and theology. He is not only a most gifted writer but also a man of great sensibility. His sensibility could very well be seen in his treatment of the disciples and the women characters of the Gospel. A particularly prominent emphasis in Luke's Gospel is his conviction that God feels strong compassion for the poor and the marginalized. The tax collectors and sinners, the poor and the oppressed, the sick and the socially marginalized, especially women are present and interact with Jesus more prominently in this Gospel than in any other. More than any other Gospel, Luke gives great importance to prayer and the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit both in the life of Jesus and in the life of his disciples. "On every step of his journey, Jesus is responding to the powerful and personal influence of God's Spirit." When we move from the Synoptic Gospels to the Gospel of **John** we feel that we are in a different world where we are given a new and deeper vision of the person of Christ. The words used in the Gospel of John are very simple, every day words like life, light, way, truth, bread, vine, branch, water, shepherd, Spirit and the verbs of action like see, know, believe, come, remain, witness, etc., although the scholars have not yet succeeded in fathoming their depths. To penetrate the depth of John's thought we require great spiritual openness. Like an eagle, John, the great theologian of the Church, has the most penetrating gaze into the mystery of God-made-man. Reading this Gospel means "flying high." The

author of the Fourth Gospel is not literally dependent on the other Gospels and he is more interested in symbolic and theological meaning than in a historical narrative. The fourth Evangelist is "a poet in that he creates speeches and perhaps also situations in order to bring out the significance of Jesus... He is expressing what he has learned about Jesus in a symbolic and dramatic way for he wants to bring out the significance of the real Jesus."

As the reader enters into the commentary part of each volume he will realize that the author has taken every effort to bring out the message of each Gospel more powerfully and effectively by quoting relevant passages from the OT books and the NT books and sometimes even from Rabbinic literature. One negative element that is seen in the commentaries is that when parallel passages are commented in different Gospels, often the same commentary part is repeated. This, however, could have been avoided, to a certain extent, by showing the editorial activity of Matthew and Luke over Mark and bringing out the particular theological nuance of Matthew or Luke by asking and analyzing the question why they changed, at least, some of the term(s) or phrase(s) from their sources. For example, both Mark and Luke report the episode of the strange Exorcist (Mk 9:38-41 and Lk 9:49-50). Luke, in his version, has omitted a clause from Mk 9:39 and more importantly changed the first person plural, "us," in Mk 9:40 ("whoever is not against us is for us") into "you" in Lk 9:50 ("whoever is not against you is for you"). This change may be deliberate on the part of Luke and is very significant. The change of the pronoun from "us" to "you," may indicate that the man might have had some kind of relationship to Jesus of which the disciples were unaware. Hence, we could presume that the man was a believer in Jesus Christ, but he was not one of the exclusive company of the Twelve, because "he does not follow with us" (Lk 9:49). Nevertheless he acted in Jesus' name and had done what the disciples had not been able to do (see Lk 9:40). Jesus tells John and the other disciples that they are no exclusive group with a monopoly on the power to exorcise; the power which they have (see 9:1) has been given to them as a gift, and they should rejoice at the fact that God can make use of any instrument at his disposal, and not the authorized ones only. The work of God is not restricted to their circle alone. The exorcist who is a stranger to the disciples is no stranger to God!

A second observation is that in some Gospel passages the explanation given is very inadequate, for example, the parable of "the workers in the vineyard" given in Mt 20:1-16. More than half of the space given for the "commentary" the author fills with thematic references that have no direct relevance to the parable, references from the parables of the sower, and the net, and from the episode on the rich young man, etc. This is an interesting parable, the message of which partly depends on how we interpret the meaning of the word "idle" that is used in reference to the second and fourth group of the workers about whom it is said that "they were standing *idle* in the market place" (Mt 20:3; see also 20:6). In almost all the English translations the word *idle* is repeatedly used. But this is a wrong translation, because the corresponding Greek word employed here is *argos*, which is a combination of *a* + *ergon*, which literally means "without work" or "unemployed." This meaning is corroborated from the fact that the labourers are presented as *standing* and not *sitting*, which can be a sign of idleness. They are standing there "without work" with the firm expectation that some landowner(s) would come there and call them for work in their fields. This is implied in the answer given by the last group of workers to the question put by the landowner of the parable, "Why are you standing here idle all day? They answered him, *Because no one has hired us*" (Mt 20:6-7). Their answer very clearly indicates that these workers were standing in the market place "unemployed" all the time relying on the mercy of the landowner(s) in calling them for work. This is the reason why the landowner of the parable tells the second group of workers: "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you *whatever is right*" (Mt 20:4). What we see in this parable is a description of the gracious character of God. "*Whatever is right*" before God is quite different from "*whatever is right*" before humans. In other words, God's justice is different from human justice. God's justice is wedded to love and mercy (Hos 2:19). God's justice is not to be limited by human conception of a strict mathematical judgement where reward is in exact proportion to merit. In verse 15, we see clearly the criterion that God uses in executing his justice: not what the law of justice requires, but what the human being needs.

These are some of the critical observations. However, the author of the four volumes in this series has put high scholarship in writing these commentaries. For some passages, such as "Jesus' Baptism" (Mk 1:9-11),

"the Beatitudes" (Mt 5:3-12), "the Sabbath violation of the disciples" (Mk 2:23-28), "the third passion prediction" (Mk 10:32-34), etc., the author has given detailed interpretation shedding more light on the respective themes and this will help the reader to reflect more deeply on the subject. These commentaries on the four Gospels are highly recommended to the preachers of the Word of God and to all those who want to understand the message of the Gospels in a better and deeper way, and live it out in a meaningful manner in their daily lives.

Paul Savio Pudussery

George Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition: A Study of the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Common Christological Declaration of 1994*, Satna: Ephrem's Publications, 2003, pages xiii + 213, ISBN: 81-88065-02-1.

This is a publication of the doctoral dissertation of George Thumpanirappel which was defended at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome.

This volume is a bold and solid step forward towards ecumenism. As the author rightly indicates in the very title of the book, it is a study on the Christology of Assyrian Church of the East and the Common Christological Declaration signed on 11 November 1994 at the Vatican by Pope John Paul II and the Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV.

On the day of Common Christological Declaration, the Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV made a historical confession, "Today the time has come to bring down the walls, which have separated us and kept us apart for fifteen centuries." In his turn, Pope John Paul II informed and instructed the faithful regarding the same Declaration: "Today we share the joy of recognizing that our faith in Christ, true God and true man, is one, and equally great is our love for Mary, his most holy Mother." So strong is the bond between Christians and the yearning for unity. This is the underlining aspiration with which the author is preoccupied in this volume.

Mar George Punnakottil, the Bishop of Kothamangalam has rightly and fittingly observed in the Foreword that the work of Thumpanirappel is "contextual and relevant to the ecumenical endeavours of the Church, especially the Indian Church."

The book comprises of four chapters along with a general introduction and an evaluation and conclusion. This volume provides two important documents of joint declarations in the appendix, which are of immense value. The elaborate bibliography and the short index given in the book serve the reader in further research and reflection.

In the first chapter an attempt is made to understand the historical background of the Church of the East along with its Christological confessions and confusions. In the light of the study, the author argues: "The Christological faith of the Church of the East always remained that of the Apostles and the Church Universal" (37).

The second chapter is a discussion on the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East. In this chapter the author exposes and examines the Christological clarifications of Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius of Constantinople and Babai the Great. There is also a section devoted to the synodal decisions of the Church of the East, where the author studies ten such synods. Another interesting area of research undertaken in this chapter is the liturgical prayers of the Church. The author concludes saying, "When we go through the liturgical prayers of the Assyrian Church of the East one thing is certain: there is no heresy involved in them. We cannot find any Nestorian heresy in the prayers of this Church" (92). Yet another investigation done in this chapter is the Mariology of the Church of the East. Regarding the century long controversy between the preferential use of terms '*Theotokos*' by the Greco-Roman Church and '*Christotokos*' by the Church of the East, the author concludes that it "was really an ecclesio-political dispute between the Sees of Alexandria and Constantinople, played out at the Council of Ephesus" (93). Concerning the conflicting views on Christology perpetuated by the schools of Antioch and Alexandria, the author prefers to walk on the ecumenical path and suggests that "it is best to see them as complementary to each other" (97).

Inter-Church relation among the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is the topic of the third chapter. The author surveys the ecumenical thrust of the Churches, for he considers ecumenism "to be more essential than before." There is a humble submission of the author that the Roman Catholic "involvement in ecumenism is recent" (99). Some of the basic principles for ecumenism are highlighted in the thesis, of course, in the light of the documents of the Churches, which may be of lasting value in the pursuit of Church unity. The study points out that "there is no longer a great deal of doctrinal disagreements existing between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches as a whole" (131). Hence, the author concludes that what is of paramount importance is "a practical application of the Second Vatican Council" (131).

The fourth chapter is on the "Common Christological Declaration" between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Pope John Paul II, while introducing Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV to the general audience, made the following remark regarding the Common Christological Declaration: "This will bring to an end after more than fifteen centuries the misunderstandings concerning our faith in Christ, true God and true man, born of the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit" (133). The Common Christological Declaration, according to the author, "has paved the way for understanding among all Churches" (166).

As a conclusion the author points out that there is "no liturgical or canonical text in the Assyrian Church of the East where it says the Christ is two persons" (172). In the opinion of the author, "The Common Christological Declaration rediscovered what already unites the Catholic and the Assyrians Churches" (172). Thus, he reiterates the relevance of the theology of ecumenism for our times, which is "a theology of discovery or rediscovery" (133).

George Thumpanirappel, an oriental Catholic belonging to the Thomas Christians of India, through his study on *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition* has sketched an outline for ecumenism through the rediscovery of the doctrine of genuine faith in Christ and promoted an ecumenical tradition in the Church. The thesis is very relevant and urgent, for the author passionately and scholarly argues that ecumenism is the need of the hour and, as I understand, the underlying force and focus of this work is the common fundamental belief in Christ: "We are one in Christ."

The author through the present volume has made an admirable contribution to ecumenism in the Church, which deserves recognition and positive response. It may be of great interest to those who are involved in the restoration and reform of the apostolic Church of the Thomas Christians of India. This is a wellspring to a student of Christology; it is a source of inspiration for a student of ecumenism; it is an initiation into the learning of East Syriac tradition; and it is an attempt to theologise in the context of the celebration of the Church, both in the light of the Synodal and Liturgical celebration of the East Syrian Church.

Paulachan Kochappilly

Francis Kanichikattil, *Divine Liturgy in the Vision of Narsai*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, pages 126, ISBN: 81-86861-49-1.

The book is a souvenir of the silver jubilee of the author's priestly ordination. In this context the liturgical vision of Narsai is significant since he was one of the first to shift the focus of theology from the Bible and speculative rational thinking of a meditative understanding of what the believers celebrate in the Divine Liturgy. The early theology of the East Syrian fathers like Aphrahaat, the Persian Sage and St. Ephrem concentrated on the interpretation of the Bible taking both the Old and New Testaments as a single and consistent book, containing the self-disclosure of God to humanity, carefully avoiding all reference to Greek philosophy. Byzantine fathers like Basil, the Gregories, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Damascene made free use of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy to make Christian faith intelligible to the sophisticated people of their times. But this effort to squeeze a faith bore in the Judeo-Palestinian context into the straight jacket of Greek cultural thinking raised many problems of faith, which had to be dealt with in several ecumenical councils. Narsai who belonged to the church of Antioch and the Byzantine theological thinking, came to the East Syrian Church and assumed an active role in the theological school of Edessa. After he had spent some twenty years there, Edessa, which was within the

Roman Empire and provided imperial protection to Christian faith fell into the hands of Persians, and the East Syrians had to shift their school of theology to Nisibis within the Byzantine borders. To this new school of theology Narsai came with the confidence of a superior church to introduce a reformist programme into a more primitive and less developed Persian Church.

Narsai was a theologian with a concern for order and discipline, an effective preacher and a prolific writer to whom some 360 works are attributed. Kanichikattil focuses his study on Homily 17, which though attributed by some to other authors, is truly representative of the theology of Narsai. The first chapter of the book gives a general explanation of the creative work of Narsai, the second an exposition of his discussion on the pre-anaphoral part of the Liturgy, the third about his interpretation of the various details of the Anaphora, and the fourth about communion. The fifth chapter of the book is an evaluation of Narsai and the sixth a discussion of his relevance to the Church today.

Brought up in the Antiochean tradition Narsai identified himself with the Greek thinking of Theodore of Mopsuestia, his predecessor in the Episcopal office, Deodores of Tarsus and others. Their intention was to make the faith and liturgy of the Church intelligible and acceptable to the sophisticated people conversant with Greek philosophical thinking. One of the crucial points here was the idea of image, which for the Persians meant true likeness and to the Greeks a mere symbol. Hence, while for the former the image by its nature tended to the fullness of likeness, for the latter it could never attain full likeness. So man was created in the image of god only in the figurative sense, namely as having dominion over the creatures of the earth, sharing in certain powers of God, the supreme object he points to and manifesting his royal authority. Adam was not a true image of God, while Jesus, the Messiah was the highest point of that likeness and the 'Son', not in any real and ontological sense but as the temple in which the Word of God dwelt. Narsai was probably the initiator of Nestorian thinking in the East Syrian Church.

Narsai's liturgical interpretation shows the two-tiered world of Platonism: On the one hand, the liturgy is a symbolic presentation of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and, on the other, also the actualisation of his sacrifice on the altar. When the deacons carry the gifts

to the altar they are said to picture the carrying of Jesus' body to the tomb, represented by the altar; it is followed at the *bema* the "*onitha d'rase*" which is a joyous celebration of the resurrection. On the other hand, Narsai interprets every details of the *Anaphora* to have an effective role in making present on the altar the reality of Calvary. He includes the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist with an effective role in making present the sacrifice of Christ, though the narrative did not have a place in the *Anaphora* of Addai and Mari. *Epiclesis* invoking the Holy Spirit transforms bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood. In Narsai's perspective, Eucharist is very much what the duly ordained ministers do at the altar, and the people are mostly passive participants. Eucharist is the mystery celebrated by the priests in the secrecy of the sanctuary away from the maddening crowd out in the world. There is a sharp distinction between the *bema* at the middle of the church, symbol of the earthly Jerusalem where readings and instructions take place, and the *madbeha*, the sanctuary, behind the veil at the eastern end, symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem. Into this "Holy of Holies," away from the unholy gaze of the people, only the priests go after the preparatory part at the *bema*, reciting the Creed. The people are bystanders waiting outside listening to what is being celebrated behind the veil. Narsai seems to indicate the historical beginning also of the sharp separation at the *Anaphora* of the Liturgy between the faithful, on the one hand, and the non-baptized and the non-absolved penitents, on the other. In the text of the liturgy commented upon by Narsai, the Deacon in three commands sends out the non-baptized, the non-absolved penitents and those who are prohibited to receive communion, while the text of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Narsai's predecessor contains no such dismissal, and some time later such offensive dismissals came to be interpreted in a purely symbolic sense.

Kanichikattil present a detailed description of the contribution of Narsai to the East Syrian liturgical tradition. Though there is little that is original in his thinking, as a prolific writer and a strong administrator, he managed to bring order and discipline to East Syrian liturgical and theological thinking, though it was by imposing on it the rigid framework of Byzantine thought. As the author points out, what Narsai tried to emphasize was that liturgy should not be stuck in a dead past, but should respond to the way of thinking of the people of the times and their actual concerns. After all, Divine Liturgy is not a repetition of what happened

centuries ago in Palestine, but a "memorial," making available to the present Church what Jesus enacted and entrusted to the Disciples: "Do this in memory of me." At the same time, as remaining faithful to the life and sacrifice of Jesus, it has to be a celebration of people today, according to their way of understanding and expression their faith.

The last two chapters of the book present a critical evaluation of Narsai's contribution and his relevance for our times. Kanichikattil pointedly remarks that those leaders of the Syro-Malabar Church who try to put the clock back and restore the early Chaldean tradition as the only authentic one have a lot to learn from the creative work of Narsai. The book is a good introduction for the study of the development of the Chaldean liturgical tradition under the Byzantine influence.

John B. Chethimattam

Thomas Anikuzhikattil, *Jesus Christ the Saviour: Soteriology According to East Syriac Tradition*, Satna: Ephrem Publications, 2002, pages ix + 392, ISBN: 81-88065-01-3.

The above work is the author's doctoral dissertation defended at the Paurastya Vidyapitham, Vadavathoor (Kottayam). It is a biblico-theological study of the East Syriac Soteriology in the light of the Gospel according to Matthew and the Acts of Judas Thomas with special reference to Mar Thoma Nazrani Traditions. The author brings out here "some important aspects of Christian Soteriology or Soteriological Christology."

The book is divided into four chapters. Chapter One is on the Distinctive Soteriological Traits in the Gospel according to Matthew. This chapter is further subdivided into four major sections. The second and third sections are devoted to the Mission of Jesus as parts One and Two, respectively, and they occupy the bulk of the chapter. The former part deals with Jesus as Saviour in his words and deeds, while the latter part is about Jesus, Saviour in his Suffering, Death and Resurrection. Chapter Two deals with the Soteriological Motives in the *Acts of Judas Thomas*. The section II of this chapter is titled "The Acts of Judas Thomas, the Icon

of Syriac Soteriology” and is an elaborate treatment of the Syriac Soteriology in almost all its various aspects and with ample references to Syriac Patrology. The section runs from page 158 to page 239 and is the most interesting part of the work. An equally interesting and important part related to this theme is from page 268 to page 316 that forms a section of Chapter Three, which is a comparative study of the soteriological elements in both the sources. In these two sections we have an extensive study of the various soteriological functions and titles of Jesus as well as a detailed discussion of the meaning of salvation. There is also a systematic presentation of the soteriology of the Syriac Fathers in a separate subsection. The theme of the final chapter is the Celebration of Syriac Soteriology in Mar Thoma Nazrani Tradition. The author deals here with the significance of the liturgical space-time, Liturgy of the Hours, the sacraments and the Feasts of St Thomas. The book contains a good bibliography and an index.

The book contains several biblical insights useful for the proper understanding of the soteriological themes we daily come across in theology and liturgy. The special contribution of the author is that he has successfully brought out the Oriental Syriac Christian roots that are often overlooked in studies and discussions related to Christian tradition. The author reminds and convinces us that besides the Greek and Latin traditions there is also a Syriac Christian heritage that is equally rich and deep. The work with an elaborate section on the celebration of Syriac Soteriology in Mar Thoma Nazrani Tradition excellently illustrates the truth of the Eastern principle *lex orandi, lex credendi* at the living example of the liturgical celebration of the Apostolic Church in India, one of the most flourishing and vibrant churches of the Oriental tradition. This, indeed, is an edification of this Church and enlightenment for its members. The book provides a comprehensive study and can serve as a very good reference work in Syriac Soteriology that can be highly recommended to students and scholars of Eastern theology, especially of the East Syriac tradition. The author deserves thanks and congratulations.

Sebastian Athappilly

George Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syrian Tradition*, Satna: Ephrem's Publications, 2003, pages xiii + 213.

For about fifteen centuries the ancient Church of the East, the Assyrian Church was wrongly and unjustly branded as a heretic Church professing the tenets of Nestorianism, a term standing for the duality in Christ, which Nestorius himself denied as he was convinced of and taught the oneness of the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. This research by Thumpanirappel, makes a systematic study of the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East and "the Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East." Though the book is titled "Christ in the East Syrian Tradition," it contains a concise and harmonious blending of Church history, Christology, Mariology, and Ecumenism from the East Syrian perspective which is based on apostolic, biblical, and patristic teachings, liturgical sources and synodal documents, and, therefore, very much Catholic and untainted with any tint of heretical or schismatic stains. The separation of the Church from the mainstream was political rather than doctrinal, and, therefore, an implicit oneness of faith was always there among the Churches from the very beginning.

The author presents the result of his research in four chapters with an Evaluation and Conclusion. The first chapter surveys succinctly the history of all Churches of the East Syriac Tradition – the historical vicissitudes of the Churches of Edessa, the Church of Persia, the Church of Mesopotamia, and the Church of India. Unfolding the historical background the author argues and proves that the Church of the East never, in its Christological faith, deviated from the teachings of the apostle and it agreed basically with the first four ancient ecumenical councils. The second chapter analyses the Christology of the Assyrian Church of the East. Certain Christological tendencies such as Arianism and Apollinarianism prior to the condemnation of Nestorianism are also explained here. Then the Christological position of Diodore, Theodore and Babai, the Synodal decisions of the Church of the East and the liturgical prayers are explicated. A few significant Syrian theological terms which were mainly the cause of misunderstanding by the Alexandrians are also clarified adding a very important note from Stirnemann that instead of

reinterpreting the terminology and expressions of the remote fifth century it is essential to redefine the mystery of our faith in terms of the concept of contemporary philosophy and theology and use of modern language. "The Common Christological Declaration (CCD) between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East" signed by his Holiness Pope John Pall II and His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos Patriarch and the "Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church," added in the appendices, could be viewed in this spirit. When Cyril of Alexandria stood for the use of "Theotokos" (Mother of God) Nestorius preferred "Christotokos" (Mother of Christ), which was biblical in content, and avoided ambiguity. It was not a denial of the divinity of Christ, since blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of Jesus Christ who is truly God and truly man. The author is of the opinion that in analyzing the Christology of a church, one should depend not on what others say about it, but on what the official documents and prayer formulations of that church state. So he makes in this chapter a survey of the main writers and the liturgical sources of this church to expose the untarnished Christology of the Church of the East. Then he comes to the right conclusion that, instead of considering the Schools of Antioch and Alexandria as holding opposite views on Christology, it is best to see them as complementary to each other. Chapter three describes the ecumenical trends in the post Vatican Council II period and redefines the modern concept of ecumenism which is not a return, but a common journey, whose goal is a communion of Churches as a unity in reconciled diversity. This definition of Ecumenism need not be looked upon with suspicion from the traditional Catholic viewpoint. This chapter makes an observation of the inter-Church relations of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches also in the post-Vatican II era. The Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius I was a land-mark in the history of ecumenical enterprise. They came to the conclusion that the faith and the Christological doctrine of their two Churches differed only in terminology but in content and substance it is the same. The last and the fourth chapter makes a study of the common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. The rediscovery and an unbiased examination of the "Bazar of Heracleides" of Nestorius revealed that Nestorius himself was not a Nestorian"! The Common Christological Declaration is one of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century as it paved the way for the

resolution of the division in Christendom that had existed for 15 centuries. The author shows how the Common Declaration affects the St. Thomas Christians in India who share the same faith of the East and whose forefathers were once unjustly condemned as Nestorians or Heretics. The Common Christological Declaration acknowledges the legitimacy of calling the Blessed Virgin Mary both "Mother of God" and "Mother of Christ" as the Churches in question accept the divine and human natures in Christ: One person in two natures. The author also cautions that there are some, forming only a minority, in the Assyrian Church who consider the CCD as just the first among many stages, in an effort to absorb the Assyrians and their church into Catholicism.

In the Evaluation and Conclusion the author says that it was due to political reasons that these churches had separated themselves from the Roman mainstream, and, hence, there existed no schism at all. According to the so-called Nestorianism, there are two persons in Christ, a doctrine which was neither held nor taught by Nestorius, and Nestorius as a heretic was a wrong picture presented to the world by sources hostile to him.

It must be observed that repetitions in this book account almost to tautology; a careful manuscript reading should have avoided many errors in spelling; at least one conspicuous instance is a subsection where the content does not go with the subtitle itself, "Christological position of the Assyrian Church during the History" (page 35). However, this study is, as Mar George Punnakottil, Bishop of Kothamangalam, in his Foreword says: "Contextual, Oriented to further dialogue and it will remain treasured piece of reference in theological circles."

Isaac Arickappillil

Asghar Ali Engineer, *A Modern Approach to Islam*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, pages 152, ISBN: 81-86861-52-1.

The book is a useful contribution to the debate that surrounds Islam and the Muslims in these troubled times. In the author's words it is "an attempt to re-read and re-interpret Islamic sources in their original spirit." It looks

at the need for Muslims to imbibe the "higher Islamic morality" which the Sufis did, endearing them to the masses in India. The restraint and 'pacifist' struggle was instrumental in spreading Islam. The author passionately calls for peace: "Peace in Islam is more fundamental than Jihad." Not violence but "a passionate commitment to justice and peace is real submission to Allah." There is immense potential in the Muslim world and Muslims are urged to reflect on and realize the "multi-layered concept" of Jihad in Islam – Jihad as a means of fulfilling the human promise through inner struggle. The author delves into the causes of fundamentalism, in general, and the social, political and economic struggles that underlie this phenomenon that has plagued the world.

The author takes up the controversial issue of Islam and nationalism and calls for '*ijtihad*' or creative and imaginative thinking to come up with the answers. The concept of '*ummah*' or community is discussed in the context of its role in the modern pluralistic society of nation states. While acknowledging that Muslims were pioneers in such concepts as freedom, he highlights the fact that today there is a need to catch up with the rest of the world where there has been greater progress. The author also looks at relations between Islamic and non-Islamic states and the issue of minorities in the modern Islamic state.

On the issue of women's rights the author points out that ironically while Islam accords rights to women, the male dominated society denies her these rights. According to the author, women in Islam are justly fighting feudal practices which are unfortunately continuing in some Islamic countries. The author passionately believes that the Quran asserts women's rights and it is only an emphasis on feudal practices rather than the teachings of the Quran that has led to the present backward condition of Muslim women.

There is a very interesting chapter devoted to economic justice in Islam. Here the author points out the Quranic concept of non-exploitative relationship between human beings as an important contribution to ethical and economic theory. Here the author argues clearly and logically for the fact that the Quran stands forever on the side of the economically exploited and oppressed people of the society. Further, in an interesting chapter on the intellectual approach to Islam the author emphasizes the need to

synthesize intellect and compassion to find answers to the problems that beset the Muslim world today.

It is, indeed, a thought-provoking book that makes us look at the most contentious issues of recent times relating to Islam and the Muslim community. It is an interesting encounter with an intellectual who has a vision for the Islamic world, and I recommend it to the members of the wider public who want to understand and appreciate the core of Islamic life and doctrine from a modern perspective.

Khalid Ahmed Mecci

Joseph Kaipayil, *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay*, Bangalore: Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy, 2002, pages x + 55, ISBN: 81-87664-02-9.

Joseph Kaipayil's recent book, *Critical Ontology*, is an insightful work dealing with the place of critical ontology in a world of philosophy in general. But it is not just finding a place for ontology among other sections of philosophy. Rather the book intends to see "Philosophy itself as critical ontology" (ix). In other words, it is a philosophical perspective by which we see "any given philosophical problem from its being-principle" (ix).

The book has three chapters dealing with philosophy in general (chapter 1), critical ontology in particular (chapter 2) and search into Being as revealed in itself, in the world and in the human self (chapter 3).

In the first chapter, the Nature and Task of Philosophy, Kaipayil introduces philosophy as a critical reflection on Being. By the word 'critical' the author means subject "to further questioning" (3). Philosophy is not dogmatic conclusions but results of intense search, which never stops. Openness to further explorations is the most salutary characteristic of genuine philosophy. By this understanding the author rules out any room for totalitarianism or dogmatism from the world of critical ontology. This chapter goes into the details of different sections or types of

philosophy with a critical judgment over them. He carefully distinguishes philosophy from religion, art and literature. "Religion is based on faith whereas philosophy is based on critical reflection" (4). Similarly "In art and literature the appeal is to emotions and feelings, whereas in philosophy the primary appeal is to human reason" (6). That the art has a sensory appeal along with its intelligent content is undoubtful. All philosophy should be based on human experience; the critical reflection over this by the human mind makes philosophy possible. Experience, analysis and formulation are the inner core of any philosophical theory. Since philosophy is not a dogmatic dead-end to the searching mind "pluralism in philosophy is a necessity" (17). The purpose of a philosophical theory is to give some meaning to one's own human existence. Critical reflection unveils values and makes our lives worth living.

In the next chapter, the author turns to his favourite expression "Critical Ontology" and tries to look at the entire philosophy from this prism of ontology, that is 'logos' of 'on', science of being. Such a philosophy must be purified from the undue mixture of other trends of philosophy, such as anthropology, psychology, ethics and even from epistemology. The main reason for this is, all these specific functions or aspects of the human reality are legitimately to be known by their own proper titles. The word philosophy is more appropriate to the critical reflection on being as such. Thus, the philosopher may consider ethics as a "being-problem," but not a moral problem. "If epistemology and ethics emerge as separate subjects, what is left to philosophy is metaphysics only" (23). But the sad thing is that there are philosophers who think metaphysics is not at all necessary. This problem is brushed aside as a case of misunderstanding of true metaphysics.

In this second chapter the author develops also his favourite doctrine of "being-principle." The being-principle of an entity "is the reason (cause) of its beingness itself. It is around this principle a particular entity is organized" (29). Each being has its own being-principle. The "ontic commitment" one has to the being-principle of any being, keeps philosophy a dynamic search forever and makes it Critical Ontology. "An ontology solidly established on critical reflection on the empirical and yet transcending the empirical in search of the being-principles of things is what we call Critical Ontology" (33).

In the third chapter, the method of critical ontology is especially applied to the world and the human being. The being-principle of the world is not the totality of the being-principles of all beings in the world, but the Supreme Being as such, which we may call God. The being-principles are subject to gradation in their beingness. Thus, varieties of existence with less or more perfection in their beingness are possible. "The Supreme Being principle has its fullness of beingness" (42). The Supreme Being constitutes the beings in the world, allowing their being to be, according to the being-principle of each entity, which is somehow pre-existing in the Supreme (49). The Supreme Being does so due to its true nature of self-giving. On the other hand, the world operates through its own cosmological principles such as, the principle of causality, unity (uniformity), dynamism and gradation. The human being is very much part of this world, yet due to the excellence of its being-principle, is characterized by self-transcendence and an inward orientation to the Supreme.

In presenting philosophy as Critical Ontology, Kaipayil has done a noble search into the nature of being and its innermost dynamics of constitution and operation. In spite of the subtlety of the subject, the author with his clarity of articulation blesses us with an easy reading.

His critical look on other authors (e.g., Kant, Heidegger) is welcome. However, it should be remembered that what we say is only a vision from our own perspective. To think that reason knows everything is a western passion in philosophy. In the East it is much different. Both seers in the East and saints of the church (e.g., John of the Cross) teaches us very well how we have to abandon our intellect and make room for faith to know the reality of God and his reflection in nature. Our reason is a very lower level of knowing. Take, for example, our knowledge of the thing-in-itself. In spite of all arguments in favour of reason, what we ultimately say is: "there must be something corresponding to what we see outside." What is this something? Seers and saints relish this "unseen and un-understood" thing in itself by faith to which all philosophy should finally submit. Kant's practical reason is certainly not Christian faith, but is a pointer for us to think that there is a way of knowing which is higher than the knowing by pure reason.

V. F. Vineeth