

BOOK REVIEWS

Watson, Natalie K., *Feminist Theology*, Grand Rapids, New York: William B. Publishing Company, 2003, pages ix + 110, ISBN: 0-8028-4828-1.

This book is a long awaited tribute to all those who lament for lack of works in Feminist Theology. To the wealth of material on feminist theology, this book will be a valuable gem. It is a fact to be recognised that the amount of literature published in feminist theology has increased exponentially in recent years, as the annotated bibliography in this book testifies. Constructive re-reading and re-thinking in Christian faith through a feminist glass has been an important milestone in modern theology. This book could be a handbook for those who are stepping into feminist theology, as the book opens out itself to the methods, ideas and valuable contributions of recent feminist theology.

The book is divided into two parts and an annotated bibliography is an added advantage in the volume. The first part of the book deals with "Scripture and Tradition." The introduction to feminist theology opens before the reader new avenues into feminist theologising and its goals. After defining feminist theology as a critical, contextual, constructive and creative re-reading of Christian theology, Natalie K. Watson enumerates feminist ways of reading the Scripture. According to her, three different categories like the reader, the text and the context are of great importance in evaluating how feminist theologians understand the Scripture.

In speaking about the question of the canon and the authority of the Bible, I do agree with the author in her statement that large parts of the Bible do not mention women, their experiences or perspectives at all. However, I have reservation about the question that follows in page 11: "What authority can biblical texts such as the Psalms, which are the patriarchal worldviews, have for women?" The question seems to be that of an extreme position. Why don't we be optimistic about the Scripture and its authority for women, too? In spite of the patriarchal worldview there are books in the Bible that highlight women, their experiences and achievements. So, why to deny the authority of certain books? The section on feminist ways of reading the Scripture ends with a positive note

stressing the need to engage with the Christian past and reclaiming women's presence and participation in it.

In the section on "Women's History and the Development of Feminist Theology," the author makes clear what feminist theology is and how it grew in different phases of history. While enumerating the contributions of women theologians during the Reformation period, the author almost makes an attempt to give a biography of those Feminist Theologians, which almost seems like an additional note to the book. The illustrations about women's history and development of feminist theology throw light into the rich heritage and contributions of the early feminist theologians, which are seldom given their due recognition.

The second part of the book is an invitation to glance through the specific themes in feminist theology. The author gives an introduction to the terminologies and concepts used by feminist theologians and gives a bird's eye-view into the themes in feminist theology such as "Beyond the Maleness of God: Rethinking Male God Language," "Challenging the Maleness of Christ: Feminist Approaches to Christology," "Feminist Anthropologies and Women's Bodies," "Feminist Discourses of Sin and Salvation," "Feminist Rethinking Mary and the Saints," "Women are Church: Feminist Reconstruction of Ecclesiology," etc. While discussing the theme on "Women are Church: Feminist Reconstructions of Ecclesiology," I wonder why the author do not make any mention about the theme of feminisation of the Church! The second part of the book is a compilation of different themes in feminist theology and so it leaves very little room for the personal contribution on the part of the author. Feminist theology is in a process of development; so, too, are the themes discussed in the book. These themes can open up new vistas and avenues for further new themes, themes that are relevant according to different contexts that could find room in the discussions of feminist theologians.

This book is a signpost for all those who are searching for a handbook on feminist theology and it could be an eye-opener as well for all those who treat feminism as a threat to the Church. As I glance through the extensive annotated bibliography, and being a student of theology hailing from India, I hope for a day when the Indian Feminist Theologians would find their place among the stars in the galaxy of feminist authors.

Sheela Nicholas

Stanley, Brian, ed., *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions, Michigan/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, pages x + 313, ISBN 0-8028-2116-2.

Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire is a collection of selected articles on Christianity, nationalism and the dissolution of the colonial empires in Asia and Africa. The articles of this book were all originally presented as papers at a conference, "Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire" held at Queen's College, Cambridge, from 6 to 9 September 2000.

Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire highlights the hidden yet open, silent yet eloquent, imperialist yet evangelical, passive yet active, local yet global, compelled yet committed contributions of the Christian missionaries in the evolution of nationalism coupled with universalism at the end of the British empire in Asia and Africa. Systematic progress of the subject is visible in different articles and it adds credibility to the work. The whole book is divided into three parts and thirteen chapters. At the beginning of the book, a helpful description about the contributors is given and then there is an "Introduction: Christianity and the End of Empire" by Brian Stanley, the editor. An elaborate bibliography of important secondary sources and a detailed index are found at the end of the volume.

The first part of the book deals with the "Missionary Traditions, National Loyalties, and the Universal Gospel." Adrian Hastings, in his article "The Clash of Nationalism and Universalism with Twentieth-Century Missionary Christianity," establishes the truth about the Church that it is both universal and national, through his penetrating perception of the reality taking into account the historical vicissitudes of the missionary endeavours. The author presents the typical tension prevailed between universality and particularity in different quarters of the Church and yet points out the healthy trend emerged as its result: "In fact, of course, if Propaganda Fide was the enemy of missionary nationalism, its own tradition had been decidedly Roman imperialist, something that could be quite as stifling of legitimate diversity" (32). Hartmut Lehmann examines the missionary activities of a few prominent German missionary societies between 1919 and 1939, namely, the Berliner Missionsgesellschaft, the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft, Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft, Bremen and Leipziger Missionsgesellschaft. The author points out that

World War I was a catastrophe for all German missionary societies. The political upheavals of Germany were reflected in the missionary consciousness and commitment. In this connection the author highlights tension of the missionaries between the rebuilding of a strong Germany and their commitment to build up the kingdom of God worldwide. As a result, the missionaries promoted a genuine Germanness and true Protestant faith in Germany and the indigenous churches in Africa and Asia.

In his article "Missions and Afrikaner Nationalism: Soundings in the Prehistory of Apartheid," Richard Elphick underscores the efforts of National Party "to make the Christian Religion the foundation of their whole life," opening the vistas for both nationalism and assimilation of the races. With the article on "The Universities' Mission to Central Africa: Anglo-Catholicism and the Twentieth-Century Colonial Encounter," Andrew Porter establishes that the UMCA members were open to African beliefs, customs, poetry and music which presented an exceptionally responsive gesture to the local world. All the same the author remarks that "their organic, mystical conception of the church, and regard for the centrality of episcopacy in all matters of faith and order, made reforms hard to contemplate" (106).

The second part of the book focuses on the "emergent Christian and national identities in Asia and Africa." Judith M. Brown explores the Indian national identity at the end of the British Raj in India, since by that time "Indian nationalism implied that to be Indian one had to be Hindu" (111). The author mentions the honoured place that the Syrian Christians of India had occupied, as they were "long accepted and integrated among Hindus and Muslims" (113). The article illustrates the tension the nation had at the time to accept an inclusive sense of Indian identity. Ka-Che Yip surveys the uneasy accommodation between church and state in China from 1912 to 1949. The author subscribes to the idea that church failed on both counts: "In not being able to convince the Chinese people of the social necessity of Christianity, they failed to convince the same people of its religious validity" (142). Daniel H. Bays portrays Chen Chonggui as an indigenous Protestant leader who stood for identity and loyalty in an age of powerful nationalism in China. Chen's career, according to the author, "showed the tensions between the quest for autonomy and the practical reality of the necessity of having sponsors or patrons, both individual and

institutional, foreign and Chinese" (162). Bays concludes the article with an observation about Chen Chongui that he "demonstrates yet another theme of Chinese Protestantism in the late imperialist and post-imperialist age" (163). Derek Peterson, in his article "The Rhetoric of the Word: Bible Translation and Mau Mau in Colonial Central Kenya," establishes the close connection between Bible translation and the creation of nationalism. He asserts: "Translating the Bible was one way the Gikuyu argued about their divisive, shared past in order to come to terms with the moral and social challenges of colonialism" (179).

The third part of the book concentrates on the Christian responses to crises at the end of empire. John Stuart examines the ways in which British Protestant missionaries attempted to interpret and to come to terms with certain aspects of African nationalism during the 1950s. Caroline Howell outlines the contribution of the Anglican Church to the resolution of the Kabaka crisis through a constitutional settlement. In the analysis of the author, "There seemed to be little reciprocity in the church-state relationship. Though the state had benefited greatly from the church's restraint over the deportation, the church appeared to be progressively sidelined by the colonial regime" (210). Philip Boobbyer studies the contribution made by "Moral Re-Armament" in the era of decolonisation. It was a movement growing from Christian evangelical roots and reaching out to people of all faiths. Concerning the Moral Re-Armament, the author states in general: "MRA productions had an easily discernible moral or religious message. The idea was that audiences might be awakened by drama in a way that direct preaching could not achieve" (221). This movement emphasised "traditional Christian truths in contemporary language" (234). According to the author, "MRA changed many lives and that it was a major force for reconciliation in a number of African states as they moved toward independence" (236).

Deborah Gaitskell makes a comparison of two texts of Hannah Stanton, demonstrating her evolving involvement with Christian mission in the era of decolonisation. In the conclusion, the author illustrates the movement from the first text to the second as "she had moved from apartheid South Africa to independent Africa" (246). Ogbu U. Kalu presents an African historiography that emphasises the religious experience, practices, and initiatives of Africans as the starting point of the story of the encounter with Christianity. Kalu's observation on the role of

the gospel in responding to the challenges of the young colony is remarkable: "They wanted a certain type of biblical religion, tapping the full pneumatic resources provided in the canon, responding to an environment with a predominantly religious cosmology, breaking down the wall between the sacred and profane and thereby bringing the resources of the Spirit world to bear on existential problems and social experience and applying scriptural ethics to family and communal relationships" (268).

Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire, thus, illustrates the hidden and providential working of the Spirit in the preaching and reaching the Gospel to one and all – a good glad glorious news to local and global, national and universal, personal and communal, cosmic and eschatological realities. Had this volume included an Indian Christian historian to represent the struggle for Indian national and ecclesial identity, it would have been more representative of the missions in the subcontinent.

However, this edited volume with erudite articles by respected authorities on the history of mission explores and expresses the mysterious working of the Spirit in the missionary endeavours by different churches for the welfare of the whole world. Undoubtedly, the book leaves an impression on the reader that every step in present and future evangelisation should recognise, respect and respond to the diversity of cultures and unity of the Gospel, which guarantees both nationalism of the people and universalism of the Gospel.

Paulachan Kochappilly

Vas, Dominic Charles, *Origin and Destiny: St. Thomas Aquinas and Śrī Madhvāchārya – A Comparative Critique*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2003, pages xviii + 508, ISBN: 81-7086-305-8.

Human beings, at the dawn of the third millennium, finds themselves in a critical and transitional phase of history, where the amazing speed of change is further accelerated by scientific progress and technological advancement. Today, from a theocentric worldview, we have drifted to an anthropocentric world vision. The forces of globalisation and the gradual formation of a global village invite us to share both the glories and grievances of the whole humankind, at whatever corner of this planet we

exist and survive. In spite of the numerous human cravings and concerns, there is an underlying sphere of basic convergence in human thought and aspirations. The present day problems and possibilities are challenging us to rethink our traditional religious and philosophical world vision so that we may face the crucial facts confronting us today courageously and trace the true, authentic meanings of life at this point of history.

The present work of Dominic Charles Vas, *Origin and Destiny*, sets before us a genuine model of rethinking and reflection in the saintly and philosophical writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and Śrī Madhvāchārya. In spite of being the adherents of different religio-philosophical traditions – the occidental and Christian philosophy of Aquinas and the Indian Vaiṣṇava thought of Madhvāchārya – both had the courage to critically examine the prevailing conceptions about God and his relation to the world and human beings in the light of the problems and prospects of the society and religion of their own times. In spite of the numerous points of divergence in their cultural settings, religious traditions and thought patterns, there is an amazing aura of similarity in their spiritual insights, philosophical vision and approach to God and the world. While successfully demonstrating how Aquinas and Madhvāchārya be accepted as sublime models of redefining our religio-philosophical insights, concepts and ideologies in the light of the realities facing us today, the author in a logical and convincing way presents before us the points of convergence in their approach to the incomprehensible mystery of God and his relationship with the world of beings and human beings.

St. Thomas and Madhvāchārya, representatives of medieval Christianity and Hinduism, are contemporary philosophers, theologians and staunch believers in God. For these theocentric thinkers, God is the “origin and destiny” of all beings. God is the most significant factor in the life of human beings, and for human beings God’s knowledge is possible. Though God is a transcendent reality pervading the whole of the universe with its omnipresence, he is also immanent to the world of beings. From the philosophical point of view, both were realists and pluralists.

Aquinas, inheriting the then prevailing Platonic-Augustinian tradition, advances through the Aristotelian path in order to explain the reality of God, the world and soul. Aquinas could achieve a synthesis of Christian theology in the light of classical philosophy. He reworked all the speculative and practical philosophies of his predecessors and, thus, gave

birth to a coherent Christian theology. Aquinas' thought is existence-centred and his philosophy reason-oriented.

Madhvāchārya, while inheriting the Vedānta-Vaiṣṇava traditions, violently opposed the monistic tenets of Saṅkara, and fought strenuously to disprove the latter's advaitic doctrine. For him the sacred texts do not advocate *Māyavāda*; on the contrary, their essence and purport is realistic theism. The Dvaita-Vedānta of Madhva has its philosophical basis in the *Prastāna-traya*, the three authoritative texts: the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavat-Gīta* and the *Vedānta-Sūtras*. Like all other systems of Indian philosophy, the religious experience is in no way inconsistent or contradictory to philosophy. Hence, the essence-centred philosophy of Madhva is *Sruti*-oriented, a revelation which is eternal and non-personal.

Origin and Destiny begins with an in-depth and exhaustive study about the various aspects of the Epistemological and Metaphysical bases of the philosophy of St. Thomas and Madhva. Both Aquinas and Madhva held realistic theory of knowledge and upheld the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. Basing on the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of St. Thomas and Madhva, the author proceeds to analyse the reality of God and his relation to the world and human beings in their respective philosophies. For St. Thomas and Madhva, God's existence is identical with his essence. Human mind has the potentiality to know the existence of God and is capable of ascending to God. While the enquiry of St. Thomas into God's existence is reason-oriented, that of Madhva is *Śruti*-oriented.

God is the creator and preserver of the world; he is the only independent being; the souls and the world are dependent upon him. God is the ultimate cause of the creation: as the world is purposeful and ordered, a being endowed with consciousness must create it. At the same time, both the thinkers put forward very solid arguments to refute pantheism and monism.

While Aquinas advocates a "creation out of nothing," for Madhva, it is an accidental change of the material cause which depends upon the will of Viṣṇu. Creation is a free act of God: for Madhva, God creates and annihilates the world just as a play (*līlā*); according to Aquinas, the purpose of creation is communication of God's goodness to creatures.

Human being occupies a very significant position in God's creation. Human being is the immediate goal of creation. The human soul, its nature and destiny are central to the philosophy of both Aquinas and Madhva. Soul is that which animates the body, and the body exists on account of the soul whereas the soul does not exist by the body. God is the ultimate end of human life and human being can attain this happiness only through the divine grace. This ultimate goal of life, the perfect happiness consists in the supernatural vision, in the beatific vision of God. In the concluding section, the author makes an enquiry into the possibility of the influence of Christianity and Islam in the religious and philosophical thought of Madhva.

Though there are areas of divergence in the conception of God, world and human beings in the philosophies of Aquinas and Madhva, the fields of convergence overtake them. What is St. Thomas to Christianity, it is Madhva to the Vedānta-Vaiṣṇava thought. They were great philosophers, saints, mystics and, all the more, great innovators. *Origin and Destiny* of Dominic Charles Vas, thus, opens before us the tremendous treasure of the wisdom that is contained in these saintly thinkers, St. Thomas and Śrī Madhvāchārya. His scientific and exhaustive work will certainly enable the sincere reader to become more enlightened and enriched about the true nature of God, the world and human beings in the light of the innovative thoughts of St. Thomas Aquinas and Śrī Madhvāchārya.

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