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BOOK REVIEWS

Swain, B. K. *Dharmasastra: A Link between Tradition and Modernity.* Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Bhavan, 2003, pages 251.

The book, true to its subtitle, tries to be a link between the well-established and universally accepted Hindu socio-religious, legal tradition and modernity, which presses for the recognition of democratic and socialistic values. As the author himself puts it, "the collection is diverse, embracing not only customer (*acara*), behaviour (*vyavahara*) and ethics (*prayascitta*), but also nationality, social philosophy and plant ecology" (Preface vii).

The volume contains 20 articles on diverse topics most of which were published in various reputed national journals. The very first article, "*Smarta Varnasrama*," sets the background, which stands as a unified vision for the rest of the reflections in this volume. One of the primary concerns of the author is to define Indian identity, which is being misinterpreted or denigrated by people with conflicting vested interests. *Dharmasastras* have dealt with the two great objects of human life, namely, *dharma* and *moksha* in Hindu culture with a view to conserve and regulate the then prevalent social order from the point of view of religion and morality.

The legislations, which consolidated the Hindu religio-cultural identity is, in fact, founded on *varṇāśrama dharma*. In an article, "Caste-system Vs Casteism," the author makes an earnest effort to show that caste (*varṇa*) is the ethereal (spiritual) and class (*jāti*) is purely man-made or artificial. Though it was Manu who worked out a social and moral system based on *varṇas* (on the basis of intellectual caliber and social responsibility), the fundamental structure of the caste system is believed to be totally Vedic (*Ṛgveda* X.90.12). The system is based on cooperation and competition. When competition "is value-based and ethical" (87) there is no danger to the existence of the society which makes use of endowments (*guṇas*) and performance for its functioning. However, in the light of the long history of untouchability, pollution and social discrimination practised against a vast section of people in the country, it

is difficult to see the truth of the following statement of the author: "It is the best and the most ideal and possible manifestation of the ethics of give and take" (86).

As to the Indian identity the author has taken a very sound stand, which could keep our country united in spite of its ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious multiplicity. He writes: "What is unfortunate is that at the instigation of the political parties our people rather choose to be identified with their religions. It is simply anathema to the real Indian reality" (97).

The issues such as the eco-friendly life (11-23), "Women's Position in Society" (133-138), etc., have been examined in the light of modern concerns, and intelligible interpretations of the ancient practices have been given. The decade long teaching experience of Prof. Braja Kishore Swain in Sri Jagannath Sanskrit University, Puri, is certainly a rich source for the author to speak on his subject with authenticity, and that really gives the work its authority.

Thomas Kadankavil

Mathew Chandrankunnel, *The Condemnation and Rehabilitation of Galileo Galilei by the Catholic Church*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, pages xxv + 227, ISBN: 81-86861-70-X.

The journey from the geocentric conception of the solar system as well as the total ignorance of the gigantic size and grandeur of the universe to today's immense wealth of knowledge about the universe has been a long and perilous one. The extent of knowledge we have today about the visible universe is amazing, and the picture emerging is truly mind-boggling. Today we know that the universe consists of billions of galaxies, each comprising billions of stars. We also know that the stars produce their intense heat and light by thermonuclear reactions. Our Sun is one of some 100 billion stars that constitute our galaxy, the Milky Way. We further know that the Sun's mean distance from the Earth is approximately 150 million kilometres, the diameter of the Sun is about 1,392,000 kilometres, its mass is about 2×10^{30} kilograms, and its average density is 1.4 grams per cubic centimetre. The temperature at the visible surface of the Sun is about $6,000^{0}$C and at the core of the Sun it is about

13,000,000^{0}c. At such a high internal temperature thermonuclear reactions occur in which hydrogen is converted into helium. The distance from the Sun to the nearest star is over four light-years or some 40 trillion kilometres. The galaxy nearest to ours is some 1.6 million light-years away. Today we know that in these galaxies some stars become supernovae while a few others become black holes with enormous density. When a star uses up all its hydrogen it becomes a white dwarf star. A white dwarf star that is about 1.4 times the mass of the Sun implodes under its own gravitational pull. This super-collision produces a thermonuclear explosion, producing a supernova whose brightness could be as high as 100 million times the brightness of the Sun. The planets of the solar system are believed to be matter thrown into space by a supernova. The Sun's gravitational field collected this matter, ultimately converting it into planets orbiting round the Sun. Speaking about the black-holes, it has been observed that the mass of some of the black-holes is billions of times the mass of the Sun, and that not even light can escape from them. For instance, the mass of a recently discovered black-hole, just a few kilometres in diameter and 13 billion light years away from the earth, is estimated to be more than three billion times the mass of our Sun. The universe itself, born in a cataclysmic explosion of super-condensed matter – the event itself is known as the Big Bang – is calculated to be about 13.7 billion years old, and is still expanding at the speed of light the farthest ones expanding at the highest velocity. Some scientists speak of the eternal expansion of the universe while others envisage a final implosion followed by yet another Big Bang explosion, and the subsequent repetition of the whole process, endlessly. According to many scientists, space itself is infinite. The string theory of the universe speaks of the possibility of a virtually infinite number of universes. Some estimates point to at least 10^{500} possible universes, each operating on its own laws of physics and chemistry. Scientists also speak of universes with five or six extra dimensions. Today we have physicists accelerating particles to near light speed and astronomers measuring and studying celestial phenomena with the most sophisticated instruments and techniques. Thus, for instance, through observations of the cosmic microwave background (CMB), which are residual radiation from the Big Bang, scientists have been successful in identifying the features of the early universe, namely, the universe at an age of about 400,000 years. Scientists have sent space probes to Mars, Saturn, Mercury, and even beyond the solar system. The space probe,

"Genesis," has recently brought back to earth a "piece" of the Sun, and it is hoped that its study would unravel the secrets of the origin of the solar system.

It would, however, seem quite an irony of history that the man who pioneered all these, the man who is rightly called "the father of modern science," was condemned and persecuted by the so-called agents of God in the seventeenth century. Our modern understanding of the solar system and the entire universe began with the epoch-making discoveries of the seventeenth century Italian astronomer, Galileo Galilei, who set out to prove experimentally the validity of Copernican cosmology as against the Aristotelian one, which was the accepted theory of the time. If Newton and Einstein, who presented a new, revolutionary world-view, are adjudged to be the greatest scientists history has ever seen, it must not be forgotten that it was Galileo who pioneered all this. No less a personage than Newton himself has acknowledged this fact when he confessed that he "stood on the shoulders of great men before him."

Although both religion and science are supposed to walk hand in hand with each other – learning from each other and offering mutual support – unfortunately, this has not been the case in history. Throughout history, especially during the last four centuries, religion and science have fought each other tooth and nail. Mathew Chandrankunnel's work, *The Condemnation and Rehabilitation of Galileo Galilei by the Catholic Church*, is a brilliant examination of one of the most notorious of such cases, namely, the confrontation between Galileo Galilei and the highest authorities of the Catholic Church of the time. The present work, published by Dharmaram Publications, is the second in the "Science and Religion" series of the Bangalore Forum for Science and Religion. Scientist and philosopher, Chandrankunnel is the chairperson of the Bangalore Forum for Science and Religion, and serves Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology and Canon Law, as its Registrar and as the professor of the Philosophy of Science. He has worked closely with many eminent scientists of India, Europe and the USA. The integration of science and religion has been one of the loftiest ambitions of the author, and he has been awarded the prestigious CTNS – Templeton Award (USA) in 2000 in recognition of his contributions in this area. Obviously, the credentials of the author to handle a topic of this nature are unquestionable.

The author has made a meticulous and profound analysis of the Galileo case, leaving no stone unturned in his investigation. The book ends with an analysis of some of the great inventions and discoveries of the present day, giving creative suggestions on how to reconcile faith and science in these cases. To begin with, it is an unquestionable truth of history that Galileo's telescope changed our understanding of the heavens. It also taught the world a new method of arriving at knowledge, the method of scientific observation and experimentation. The ecclesiastical authorities, for whom the sole source of knowledge was the Scripture, divine revelation, the Fathers of the Church, tradition, philosophy, and theology, saw in the new system a threat to their claim to having the monopoly of truth. A clash, therefore, was inevitable. The author describes how the ego of the ecclesiastical authorities and their closed system of thinking were, to a great extent, responsible for making the matters complicated. Although the actions taken by the ecclesiastical authorities could be justified on various grounds, they should have been humble enough to acknowledge that divine revelation can work through scientific discoveries as well. If armchair speculation was the tool of the past, scientific investigation is the tool of the present. As Pope John Paul II has rightly admitted, the secular world also is an instrument in the hands of God as far as the quest for truth is concerned. It was a folly on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities to insist that God's revelation is to be seen in the geocentric Aristotelian cosmology, not in the heliocentric Copernican cosmology. According to them, the heliocentric theory is wrong and so is unacceptable because it contradicts scriptural evidence. It was the new scientific spirit inaugurated by Galileo that helped humanity get rid of ignorance and superstition. When Cardinal Robert Bellarmine administered to Galileo the directive of Pope Urban VIII that he refrain from either holding or defending the Copernican theory, the Church was acting upon the firm belief that belief in the Copernican system, as against the Aristotelian system, was incompatible with Christian faith. Galileo, however, refused to oblige because for him there was no clash between his faith and his belief in a scientific truth. Galileo, thus, became the prototype of the modern believer-scientist. Bellarmine won the "duel" then as he got Galileo condemned, but ultimately Galileo emerged triumphant when Pope John Paul II rehabilitated him. There is a message here for the modern believer and the modern scientist: Since both faith and science seek truth and since both are God's ways of working in, and

influencing, human history, there cannot be any clash between the two – a point made clear in John Paul II's encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. This may also lead to the right conclusion that our theology must be dynamic and evolving, not static; it needs to be re-invented all the time in the light of fresh scientific discoveries and emerging social realities. There is no need to panic when new scientific truths challenge old beliefs; just understand that these are God's ways of working in history and leading his people to greater levels of enlightenment, development, and progress. By establishing the Pontifical Academy of Sciences the Church has tacitly acknowledged the fact that the Absolute works in human history in manifold ways, all for the glory of God and the benefit of the humans. As the author rightly observes, "For the theologians and Church authorities, it became a constant reminder and warning for centuries to come; there should not be any more condemnation of scientific discoveries" (110).

It should be understood that Galileo's was not the only condemnation of the time. Condemnations and burning at stake were rather common. Thank God, Galileo was only placed under house arrest, not burned at stake. Galileo's fame and the influence of his powerful friends at both the ecclesiastical and political levels were factors that helped him to get away with a milder punishment. At any rate, it must be admitted that in the long run the condemnation of Galileo, where dogmatism prevailed over scientific truth, did to the Church more harm than good. As the author himself puts it, "This event became a tragedy more for the Church than for Galileo. Galileo became a martyr for progress, new vision, and science" (110).

Chandrankunnel's work is creative and thought provoking, timely and relevant, and its implications are many and far-reaching. The author presents systematically and powerfully and in lucid language, the various issues involved in the Galileo controversy. He has succeeded in making a significant contribution to the field of the integration of religion and science. Understood properly, and used properly, this book will stimulate us to seek new philosophical and theological insights regarding the vast universe, humans' place in it, and the plan of the Supreme Being for both the universe and the humans. God is the God of the whole universe, not merely of this tiny speck, which we call the earth and a few humans inhabiting it.

Jose Thadavanal

Devadat (alias Cletus Mathew), *The Acosmic: Human Quest for Liberation and Deification: Revisiting Christian Spirituality of Its Source*, Bangalore: Ashirvanam Publications, 2004.

The Acosmic: Human Quest for Liberation and Deification (Revisiting Christian Spirituality at Its Source) by Devadat is a monumental work on monastic spirituality of the Desert Fathers. The acosmic is that which is not of this cosmos, but having no roots here in the world, whose mind and heart are focused on the beyond and whose dreams and destiny are the master of cosmos. To be liberated from this contaminated and perishing world and to be united with the divine through a process of deification are the age-old aim and ambition of the religionists everywhere. A research into these aspects of Christian religion is, as Devadat states, a revisiting of Christian spirituality at its source namely the Bible and the early Christian tradition. The aim of the book is, therefore, neither mere academic inquisitiveness nor reviving of the dead past, but to return to the early sources of Christian spirituality and tap its acosmic vision in order to effect a conscientisation on the destiny and transcendental dimensions of human existence. At a stroke, therefore, the author brings out the early Christian spirituality in its anchoretic and coenobitic forms, exposing its clear and pronounced biblical basis. The gospels, the source of Christian spirituality, demand a spirit of acosmism, namely the spirit of *Fuga Mundi* and self-renunciation from every follower of Christ. This, in fact, is the Kenosis of Jesus Christ.

The "Opus Magnum" as it is, with its 670 pages, is divided into 3 parts with 22 chapters. The point at issue here is the radical renunciation proposed by the gospel paving the way for the ideal "*fuga mundi*" into wilderness, which later became a powerful movement in the church, culminating in the acosmic way of life. The book is meant for all, not for monks alone, because "it discusses nothing but the practical results of the gospel values drawn to their logical conclusions," namely the acosmic spirit is for every Christian.

Going into the details of the spirituality of the desert fathers, the author beautifully brings out the characteristics of a monk such as the renunciation of the world beginning with the *fuga mundi*, radical renunciation of the self and material possessions. At the same time the

monks' attachment to God through prayer and asceticism is also brought out. These are well substantiated with references, citations and even long quotations from the original sources, as can be seen from the footnotes and bibliography, which really authenticate the quality of the book, exhibiting the extensive and painstaking reading and research the author has done.

The overall conclusion of the author is that "there is a monk in everyone or every human being is a potential monk – *Homo sapiens, homo monasticus*." Everyone at the very depth of his being experiences a craving or restlessness to be with his "Summum Bonum." St. Augustine has beautifully expressed it from his own experience: "Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." This magnetic attraction generates in human beings restlessness until they find rest in Him. The ideal of *fuga mundi* or acosmism is the direct result of this inbuilt restlessness.

The book offers a lucid reading with clear expressions and simple but appropriate vocabulary. An almost exhaustive bibliography, thousands of references, index to the names of places and persons, and an elaborate thematic index enhance the scientific character of the work. I recommend the book to all those who are interested in Christian spirituality and consecrated life.

James Aerthayil

Palakeel, Joseph, ed., *Towards a Communication Theology*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2003, pages 280, ISBN: 81-7086-298-1.

This book is a collection of papers attempting to awaken the sleeping Catholic conscience to the challenges of the "information super highway." Besides the introductory essays, the whole work is divided into two parts: i) Communication Theology: Method, and ii) Communication Theology: Practice.

In the introductory part, Joseph Palakeel describes Christianity itself as communication; for it is the greatest message Jesus has communicated to the world. The author, however, finds that the Christian community or the Church is far behind the communication exposure of the times. Sebastian Vadakkel, in the second article, attempts to conscientize the

readers about the need of equipping themselves with the skills of communications, following the message of Pope John Paul II, for the effective and convincing way of evangelisation. Robert A. White, in his article, cautions the church of its 'lifeless' and 'stagnant' mission of today, which is in urgent need of reformation in "formation outlook" and revival of teaching methods.

In the first paper in Part I, Joseph Palakeel refers to the enormous changes the communication media have brought in the present day context and the shift in the understanding of language and media. We have witnessed a dawn of a new language that is least bothered about the structural perfection. Today's theology in rather verbal, which needs an immediate reformation. Despite the efforts by Karl Rahner, the supernatural realization visualized by Vatican Council II has not been achieved. Need of the time is to become theologically formed than informed. In the second paper Michael Amaladoss speaks about "Theology's Responses to the Challenges of Communication," where he pictures Trinity as the mystery of communications, and exhorts the church to run away from the 'logo-centric' approach to respond effectively to the contemporary media's challenges. Jacob Parappally, in his paper "Theology as Communication," speaks of God's communication for human liberation, which finds its fulfilment in the incarnation, God's self-gift.

Antony Kalliath, in his topic, "Communication theology: Inter-cultural or Inculturational?" speaks of the relevance of inculturation in pursuit of the praxis adapting ourselves to the challenges of media communication. John Edappilly, while writing under the title "Image and Sound in Theologising," explores the role of information technology in the present day evangelisation, by identifying audiovisual language as the new language of communication. Sebastian Elevathingal, when talking about "Art and Theological Communication," traces out his fear of church in alienating art from its mainstream and calls for the adaptation of arts and culture for better theological communication.

Part II is dealing with the integration of communication in formation. In the first paper, Sebastian Periannan presents the concept of "Communication Theology for Formation and Mission: Its Impact in the Contextualised Philosophy and Theology." Henry D'Souza is concerned about "A Response to New Media Culture" and highlights certain efforts

by CBCI, NISCORT, Jeevan TV, etc. With the statistical analysis of the programmes – curricular and co-curricular – conducted in almost all important seminaries of India, George Plathottam gives a Saletian approach to the challenges of media from the experience and experiments by Saletians through the decades. Augustine Savarimuthu deals with the "Communication Challenges to Theological Education" where he finds that human communication is dynamic and ongoing. The modern communication media, however, suppressed the aspects of human mutual communication.

The work is really a new venture to conscientise the concerned authorities about the need to rise to the situation and to get equipped with skills of modern communication. The authors of this volume have succeeded to a great extend in the effort to bring about the ideas and ideals concerning the theme. The editor could have avoided the repetition of at least some points in almost all the articles. Still his concern should be appreciated and the work puts before us the effective ways of future evangelisation.

Biju Tharaniyil